

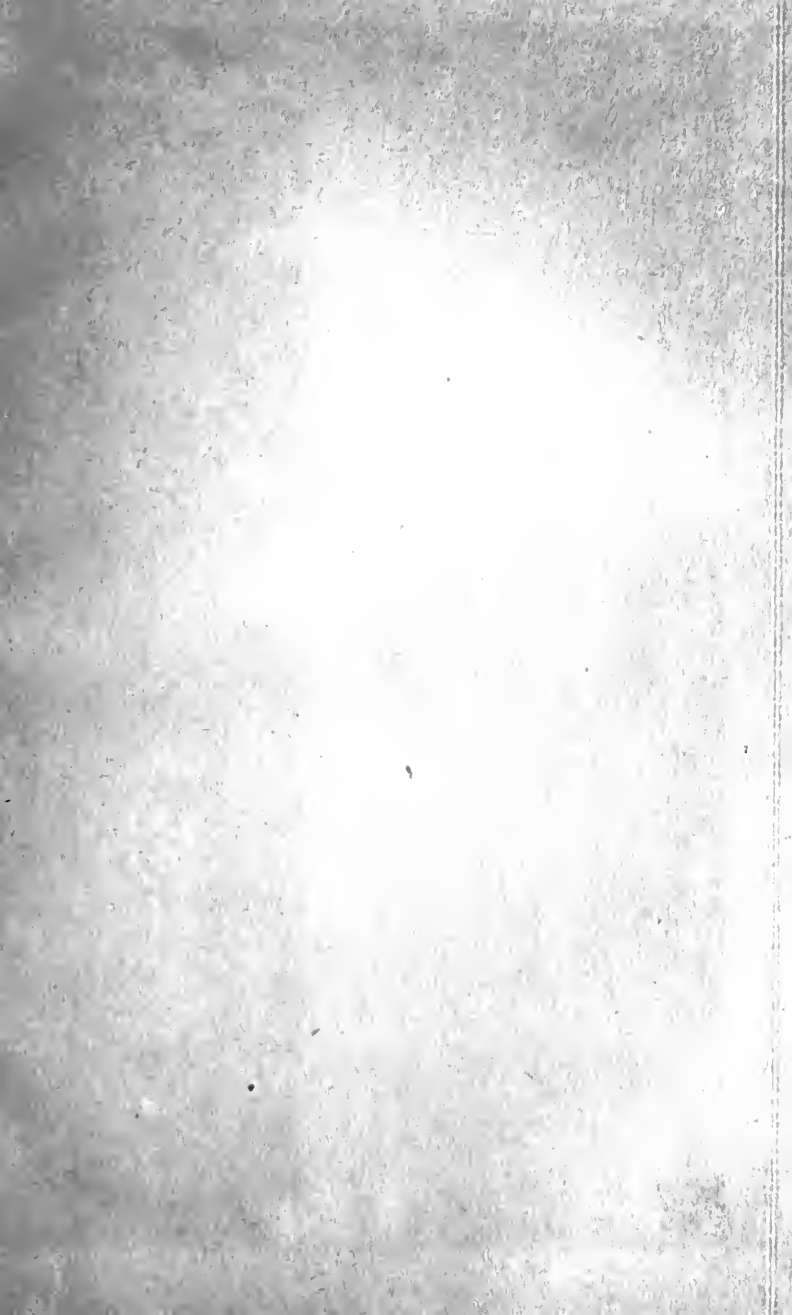
A ROMANCE OF AUSTRALIA

The Call of the Southern Cross

JOHN MANDER

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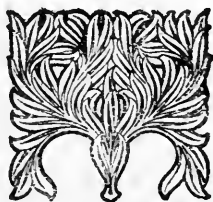
THE CALL OF THE
SOUTHERN CROSS



The Call of the Southern Cross

A Romance of Australia

BY
JOHN SANDES



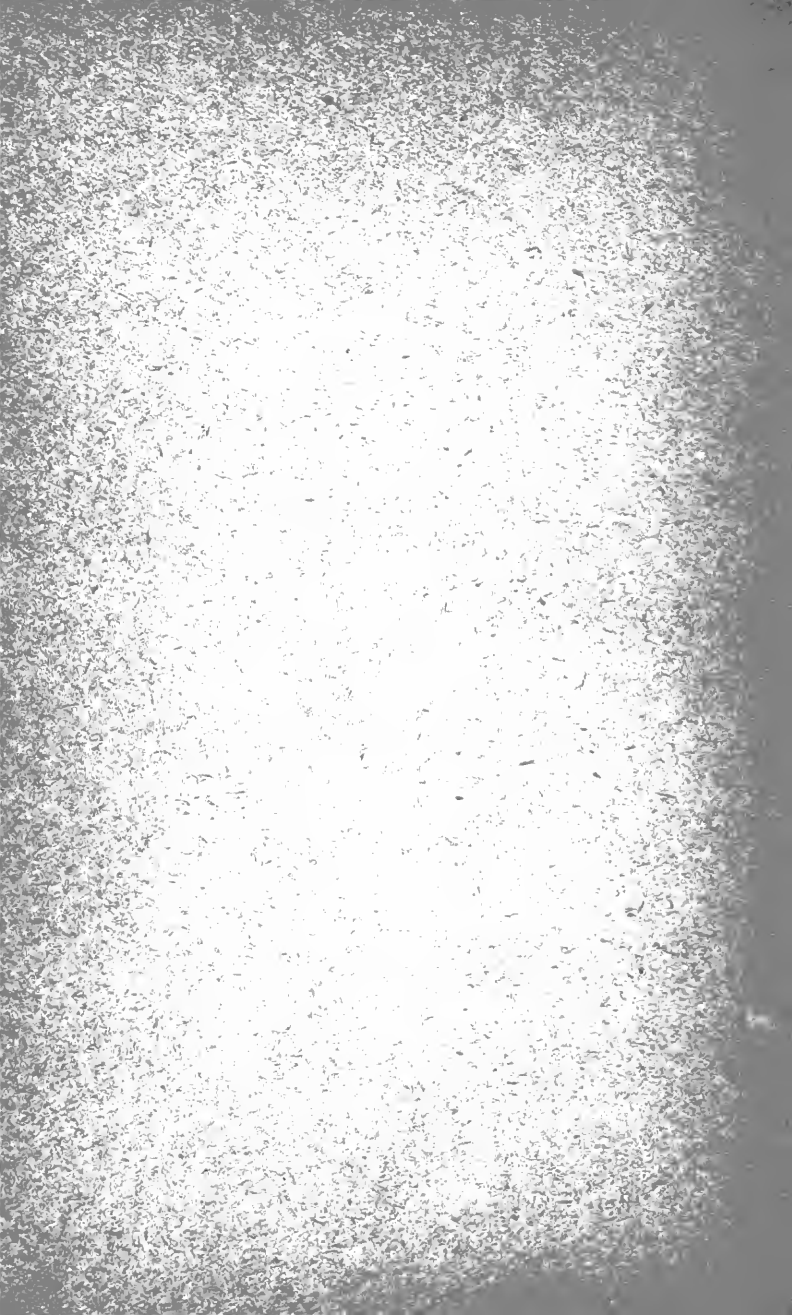
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CHAPTER I.

TOM BRISBANE MAKES A USEFUL FRIEND.

If that energetic young ensign, Tom Brisbane, of His Majesty's 38th Regiment of Foot, had not been quartered in Galway in 1790, and had not shouted a ringing "hooray" when a long-nosed young officer on a raking bay mare flew over a formidable stone wall that had pounded most of the field, Sydney Verner would not have been born at Parramatta a good many years later, and this veracious chronicle of his strange experiences would never have been written. That is at least as certain as anything can be in this uncertain world.

The long-nosed young officer, who happened to be a lieutenant in the 12th Light Dragoons, and who was passionately fond of hunting, turned in his saddle to see who it was that had shouted "hooray," with such obvious sincerity. Making inquiry of a local squireen, Mr. Cornelius Blake by name, the lieutenant was curtly informed that the acclamer of his horsemanship was "a d——d Scotchman be the name of Brisbane." Whereupon after transfixing Mr. Blake with a most haughty stare from his cold blue eyes the long-nosed young officer rode off as hard as he could in the wake of the flying hounds, and at the first check found himself alongside Tom Brisbane, to whom he courteously offered his hunting flask. The young ensign took a drink from the flask with a smile of thanks, and there and then inaugurated a life-long friendship with the long-nosed young officer, whose name was Arthur Wellesley, and who many eventful years afterwards procured for Major-General Brisbane, K.C.B., the gover-

norship of the colony of New South Wales in succession to Macquarie.

It is very doubtful whether at that time Tom Brisbane had ever heard of New South Wales, the distant colony of which he was to assume the reins long afterwards as a result of a personal request made by the Duke of Wellington to Earl Bathurst, the Secretary of State for the Colonies. He had embarked on a military career, and as his adventure eventually led to Henry Verner with his wife and little son and daughter coming to New South Wales where the second son, Sydney, was soon afterwards born, it is necessary to keep an eye on Tom Brisbane's campaigning and follow him as rapidly as possible from one battlefield to another, until at last he was able to spend his time more congenially in his observatory at Parramatta.

After hunting over the Galway stone-wall country, and shooting the Galway wood-cock in the company of that long-nosed Arthur Wellesley, who was the keenest sportsman that Tom Brisbane had ever met, the young ensign of the 38th was summoned to serve his country in less agreeable circumstances, and he bade good-bye for a season to the long-nosed young gentleman, who went back to Dublin Castle to resume his duties as aide-de-camp to the Lord-Lieutenant, Lord Westmorland.

By steady devotion to his military duties, and the exercise of some considerable family influence—for the Brisbanes of Brisbane House, Largs, in Ayrshire, were people of some consequence, and had a guid conceit o' themselves—the young ensign found himself a captain when the war with France broke out in 1793. Having received his captaincy in the 53rd regiment, he journeyed to Flanders and smelt powder for the first time in the Duke of York's disastrous expedition.

Long years afterwards, in the sultry Sydney summer, the Governor of New South Wales was accustomed to look back to those freezing marches—when the army was retreating to Bremen and when for six nights in

succession he slept in the snow wrapped only in his military cloak, and awoke at dawn to find himself frozen to the ground. And once no fewer than 800 men who had lain down like him to sleep never woke again. It was not much wonder that "our armies swore terribly in Flanders."

But it was a fine hardening experience for Tom Brisbane, and after fighting and freezing for a couple of years in the Low Countries he sailed with Sir Ralph Abercromby's expedition to the West Indies, where he fought, and was grilled, at Jamaica, and where he began that study of astronomy which was the real interest of his life.

But, once a soldier, always a soldier. Retirement on half pay did not suit Tom Brisbane's active spirit, and after a period of enforced idleness he bethought himself once more of that long-nosed young gentleman who had been so friendly with him at Galway and with whom he occasionally corresponded still. Tom Brisbane, though a colonel, was plain Tom Brisbane still, but the long-nosed lieutenant, by reason of his genius for harrying the enemies of Great Britain, had been made a marquis, and members of Parliament who had been clamoring for his recall a few years earlier were tumbling over each other in their desire to offer him the thanks of the nation for his victories and to vote him generous grants.

So, Tom Brisbane, after much cogitation and also much earnest consultation of the stars, wrote to his distinguished friend who was Commander-in-Chief of the allied forces in the Peninsula, and suggested that he would like an appointment if one could be found for him.

Wellington received the letter at Arroyo das Molinos, just after the complete surprise and defeat of Giraud's force by General Hill, and he was in a very good humor indeed. So he promptly wrote a short despatch to the Secretary for War, in which he required rather than recommended that Colonel Thomas Brisbane should be

forthwith gazetted a brigadier-general and appointed to the command of the first brigade in the famous Third Division under General Sir Thomas Picton. The request was at once complied with. Colonel Brisbane lost no time in getting his equipment together, and he arrived at Wellington's headquarters early in 1812, with two horses, two pack mules, and a creaking iron-wheeled Portuguese ox-waggon, loaded with his ample baggage, in which he had included as many astronomical instruments as he had dared to bring.

So there he was—in the field again and full of fight. His personal staff included two thieving Portuguese muleteers, and he speedily provided himself with a batman or soldier-servant in the person of Private Terence Flynn, and a clerk or secretary in Private Henry Verner, who was strongly recommended for the post by his colonel.

"You'll find Verner a most useful fellow, General," said Colonel Fox, confidentially, "a man of considerable ability and education. Indeed, I have heard that he held a commission formerly, but retired and fell on evil days. Having neither money nor friends, he returned to the only trade that he knew, and enlisted in the ranks."

So Private Verner took his place in the ranks when the troops were on the march, and when in camp he performed the duties of clerk to Brigadier-General Brisbane, who taught him how to use the sextant, and how to take the daily observation that enabled the Brigadier to keep the time of the army.

Verner was a silent, uncommunicative man, but an excellent soldier. With his refined and regular features and his tall, graceful figure, he was in marked contrast to most of the rank and file of his battalion. On one occasion a foul-mouthed fellow named Jim Mullens, who was an ex-prizefighter and belonged to Verner's company, was indiscreet enough to comment with blunt offensiveness upon his birth and breeding, and, being in liquor at the time, to cast aspersions on his

mother. The mill that followed was long remembered in the battalion, for the ex-pugilist got a worse hiding than he had ever received in the ring. So, after that they took care to let Private Verner alone.

It was soon after Brisbane arrived to take the command of the first brigade in Picton's Division that Wellington began the brilliant series of movements that ended in the complete rout of the French army at Vitoria. In six weeks Wellington, with 100,000 men, marched 600 miles, crossed six great rivers, captured two fortresses, and fought a decisive battle, by which he hurled King Joseph Bonaparte and his army across the Pyrenees and out of Spain.

Brigadier-General Brisbane, whose name is commemorated in the capital of Queensland, the site of which was discovered by his Surveyor-General, Mr. John Oxley, long after the last battle of the Peninsular War was fought, marched every step of that 600 miles to Vitoria, and played his part as a brave and capable leader of men, when the great collision took place between Joseph Bonaparte's army and Wellington's British-Portuguese force with Spanish auxiliaries.

Along with the brigadier and his three battalions went his clerk, Private Verner, and his batman, Private Flynn. But in that great historic march there also participated Mrs. Biddy Flynn, whose right to travel with the battalion was recognised by the Regulations which prescribed that soldiers' wives to the number of four to six per company might follow the army on the march. Thus it was that Mrs. Biddy Flynn was one of a strange assemblage of about forty wives, the hardest of campaigners, who marched in the rear of the battalion, and whenever they could elude the Provost Marshal, in advance of it, riding for the most part upon donkeys, and enduring untold hardships with extraordinary fortitude.

Brisbane encountered his batman's wife very early in the campaign, and she freely enlightened him as to her history.

"Shure, me first husband, Mick Donovan, wasn't he kilt at Talavera. Hiven rest his sowl, an' me not two days a widder whin Flynn axed me would I have him. An' I tought I'd better be stayin' wid the battalion, yer 'anner, for what would I be doin' at home in Connemara and me own sisters throwin' it up to me that I wint away wid a soldier. So I tould Flynn I'd have him, an' he found a praste to marry us inside av a week, an' shure life's a quare thing, yer 'anner, an' we must all make the best of it."

So Mrs. Flynn dropped a curtsey to the "gineral" and went off to make a drop of tay for Terence and herself, which they wanted badly, for the battalion had marched twenty miles since daybreak. A tough old campaigner was Mrs. Flynn, but she had a heart of gold, as will presently appear.

When the bugles blew an hour and a half before daybreak, as was the invariable rule when the army was on the march, Mrs. Flynn was always the first out of the blankets and ready to give Terence a helping hand in getting ready his pack. Camp fires blazed out in the darkness, camp kettles were put on to boil, and Mrs. Flynn picking her way down the regimental lines among the stacked halberds and the sleepy soldiers bandied many a rough jest with the men as she slipped away to steal a few handfuls of hay from the commissariat cart for her "burro," tethered far off among the transport mules of the battalion. Then back for a bit of breakfast with Terence—bacon, biscuit, and the inevitable cup of "tay," and precisely at daybreak she was ready to march with the army.

There was the army—ready to march. Method, organisation, discipline had done the business. Here was a whole division of 6,000 men—Picton's division, of which General Brisbane commanded a brigade, and of which Mrs. Flynn was a unit recognised by the Regulations,—and in an hour and a half the men had dressed, breakfasted, and rolled and packed their blankets and equipment. They were paraded in companies, told off

in sections of threes, and marched to the alarm-posts of their respective regiments and finally to the alarm-post of the brigade, where they formed in close companies and marched off by sections of threes from the right, at sloped arms, and with the greatest precision and regularity.

Mrs. Biddy Flynn and the other women followed the column on their burros, the assistant provost marshal with his guard bringing up the rear of the column, and being followed by the rear guard, under an officer who picked up all stragglers.

In this way the army steadily made its way northward in accordance with the plan that was formed in the brain of that tall, spare, silent horseman in cocked hat, cloak, and cape, blue tightly-buttoned frock coat, and boots and breeches. "The mind of a great commander is the soul of armies," says one of the old time historians of war, and the mind of Wellington was certainly the animating principle of the army that marched by day and rested by night, northward and ever northward, to where King Joseph Bonaparte and Marshal Jourdan lay with 70,000 men encamped near the little city of Vittoria.

While Wellington was weaving his spells, King Joseph remained inactive, first vacillating, and then paralysed by his inability to discover what was going on behind the frowning ranges that encircled the valley of the Zadora, beyond which rose the spires of Vittoria. And so it was that on the 20th of June, 1813, Brigadier-General Brisbane knew before he lay down to sleep that on the morrow he would fight the greatest battle of his life. He discussed the position freely with his clerk, Private Verner, who was writing out his orders. Brisbane was on the Staff of the Army, and was in close touch with the Duke. He had a map on the table in his tent, and he pointed out the features of the country to this very intelligent private, whose appearance, manners, and education were so inconsistent with his station.

"You see, Verner," said General Brisbane, indicating a winding line on the map, "here is the river Zadora, curving through the valley, and protecting the French position on the opposite hillsides. The river has steep, high banks, and is practically unfordable. General Graham, with his division, has already got across the high road to France, and has cut the main line of retreat, so that the French army, if it escapes us at all, can only get away by bypaths."

Verner nodded his head. "In which case," he said, "it must drop all its artillery, baggage, and stores."

"Precisely," said Brisbane, "and if everything goes right to-morrow, we should have a good chance of capturing King Joseph himself along with his baggage. Well, good-night, Verner. The general advance will begin at daybreak. You had better get a few hours' sleep, if you can." The brigadier dismissed his clerk, and sat up writing letters until midnight, when he turned in for a couple of hours' sleep.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHILD OF THE BATTLEFIELD.

There was a thick mist and a light rain was falling when the army moved forward at daybreak. Flynn and Verner, who were in the same company, found themselves climbing up the steep hillside together, and as the sun rose just when they reached the crest they could see the British uniforms trickling over and through the hills all around them, and flowing into the valley in a great and ever-growing torrent that soon became a flood.

As Verner and Flynn scrambled down the stony hillside together, they became aware of a lonely little cottage nestling on the flank of the hill in the midst of a small patch of cultivated ground. It was right between the opposing armies. Coming closer to it they perceived the Spanish peasant, who was the occupier of the place, sitting on a wheelbarrow, smoking, and in a shed alongside the cottage was a girl, milking a cow. As the redcoats came swarming down the hillside, she looked up with a startled gaze, and ran to her father.

The black-bearded Pedro Moreno shouted to Verner, and, Verner, who had picked up a good knowledge of Spanish during his campaigning, rapidly explained to him the danger of remaining at the cottage, as the French artillery might open at any moment, and the peasant and his daughter would be in serious danger.

At this remark Juana approached, wide-eyed, and Verner saw that she was a pretty, dark-eyed girl no more than 16 years of age at most. He smiled at her encouragingly, and told her not to be frightened, whereupon she blushed shyly and clasped her father's hand.

Moreno quickly grasped the military position. He had seen more than one battlefield during the past four years. He spoke rapidly in the rough patois of northern Spain. "The French devils are over there. They have been in this valley for weeks. Carajo! They have dug up and eaten my turnips, they have driven off my sow and her eleven young ones, they have taken my two best bullocks to drag an ammunition waggon, and if I had not sat at my door with my rifle on my knee they would have taken my daughter, Juana, also. But they are strongly posted, senior. It will be hard work to drive them out.

"Lord Wellington will drive them out very quickly when he once begins," said Verner, "meanwhile I strongly advise you to remove with the little Juana to the other side of this range at the back of us. You will be far safer there." The soldier, who was usually so silent and reserved, smiled pleasantly at Moreno's daughter. "Don't you think so, Juana?" he asked, and the girl nodded and showed her pretty white teeth in a pleased smile. She liked this tall Englishman already, and was fluttered at the thought that he was so solicitous for her safety.

Moreno scowled as he looked across the Zadora, and shook his fist at the hills on which the French outposts were drawn up. "If His Excellency Lord Wellington could cross the river he might soon drive out those French devils," he remarked. And then he added, suddenly, "It is I, Pedro Moreno, who will guide His Excellency. It is I who will show him where he can cross."

Verner was startled. "Where is the place?" he asked rapidly.

"At the bridge of the Tres Puentes," said Moreno. "I shall guide His Excellency to it myself. You will take me to him now."

"Oh, father, must you leave me?" It was Juana who spoke.

Pedro turned to her swiftly and kissed her on the

forehead. "It is necessary for me to go now, my little Juana, but I will be back soon, and if any accident should happen to me, this English soldier will look after you. So, courage, my little girl, and now good-bye. You will look after her, senor, will you not?"

And Verner quietly assented.

By this time the columns were pouring into the valley on the right and on the left, but still the Frenchmen made no sign.

Flynn had gone on and rejoined his company, which was already forming up with the brigade. Verner hurried along with the black-bearded peasant to where he saw the easily recognised figure of Wellington, who sat on his horse surrounded by his staff, and repeatedly glanced impatiently at the tail ends of the columns that were still defiling into the valley of the Zadora.

General Brisbane as a member of the Staff of the Army, was one of the group, and it was he who first recognised Verner.

"Now then, Private Verner, what on earth are you doing here? Why are you not with your company?"

Verner saluted punctiliously. "I came across this civilian, Sir, who desired to be brought to the Commander-in-Chief. He declares that he can guide the troops to a place where the river can be crossed."

"Eh, what's all this?" said Wellington himself, who rode up in time to hear the explanation. "Well, my man; if you do what you say you can do, you shall be well rewarded. Where is the place?"

"The bridge of the Tres Puentes, Excellency," said Moreno, looking Wellington frankly in the face. "The French pigs have left it unguarded. I can guide you to it now."

Wellington made up his mind instantly. The tail-ends of the columns were already through the hills. "Lead on, then, Guide," he cried.

But Moreno stopped for a moment to say a few words to Verner. "And remember, senor," he said, "if anything happens to me you have promised to look after

my little Juana, for she has no one else but me to look to now."

"I give you my promise," said Verner, and he clasped the peasant's strong hand in his own and pressed it earnestly.

Wellington selected Kempt's brigade of the Light Division to open the ball. A bugle blew, and the brigade was quickly on the march, led by this brave Spanish peasant, who guided them by a circuitous path through rough and rocky country to the bridge of the Tres Puentes, a narrow wooden structure that had been entirely overlooked by the French general, Marshal Jourdan. In fact, Jourdan was harassed so perpetually by King Joseph's constant interference that he forgot many other things on that ill-fated day as well as the bridge of the Tres Puentes.

As Kempt's brigade dashed across the bridge, followed by Picton's first brigade, in which Verner and Flynn ran side by side, the French at last realised that the bridge of the Tres Puentes had been left unguarded, and they opened fire from their battery on the rising ground that commanded the bridge.

As the Spanish peasant stood with outstretched arm pointing out the path to a couple of officers a round shot from the battery struck him, and hurled him to the ground. He was lying there in a pool of his own blood, while his life ebbed away, when Picton's brigade reached the bridge head and Verner saw him.

Holding his water bottle to the lips of the dying man, Verner caught his last words. "Senor, it is for your country as well as my own that I die. Remember your promise. Take care of my little Juana."

Pedro Moreno, a peasant with a hero's soul, fell back dead, and Verner rushed forward to rejoin his battalion, which was supporting the 15th Hussars, who had crossed the bridge of the Tres Puentes and were now preparing to charge the French batteries.

It was Picton's sudden rush with his troops across the bridge and right up to the village of Arinez that

first shook the French defence. Brisbane and his brigade were in the hottest of the fighting, and they pressed forward indomitably, driving the French back to the second range of heights in front of the village of Gomecha.

But the second position soon became as untenable as the first, for the centre attack was directed by Wellington himself with four divisions of infantry, together with his artillery and cavalry, and D'Urban's Portuguese horsemen. The whole weight of this force was hurled upon the shaken French defence, which was steadily pushed backwards, and the battle resolved itself into a running fight and cannonade for six miles towards the city of Vittoria.

It was 6 o'clock in the evening when the French were driven from the last defensible height and the British troops, "faint yet pursuing," could see the terrified multitude of the non-combatants, a confused mass, including numbers of women and children, carriages and vehicles of all sorts, and transport animals, all gathered in the plain behind the city.

What a rout!

Never was there seen anything like it in the whole five years of the war. The streets of the city were so densely blocked with fugitives and carriages that the pursuing cavalry could not force their way through the mass in time to cut off King Joseph, who jumped from his travelling carriage and escaped on horseback, when the British riders were yelling "View holloa," as they hunted him on the line of retreat to Salvatierra.

Nothing saved King Joseph but the fact that the horses of the British cavalry could not raise a gallop at the close of that tremendous day.

The French King saved his skin, but he lost everything else, for though his army escaped with a loss of 6,000 men on the field of battle, he had to throw away all his artillery, transport and stores, and even the priceless pictures and art treasures that he was carrying away with him from the Royal Palace at Madrid.

Late in the evening, when the troops were still cheering in the exaltation of the great victory, Henry Verner made his way back slowly over the eight miles of country that he had traversed in the fury of the fight. Here and there—especially on the crests of the hills, where there had been hand to hand fighting—the dead men, both French and English, lay thickly, and Verner could see the ghouls of the battlefield, Portuguese muleteers and camp followers, flitting hither and thither, as they bent over the corpses robbing them.

The moon was riding high in the heavens as Verner reached the bridge of the Tres Puentes. He had brought a spade with him. He intended to bury the brave Spanish peasant where he had fallen.

And then the thought struck Verner that it would be necessary for him to go still further—up to the flank of the hillside on which Moreno's little cottage stood in its patch of cultivated ground, so that he might break the news to that brave peasant's daughter, and at the same time find out from her where her dead father's relatives could be found, so that he might hand her over to them. He felt a thrill of pity for Juana. The task in front of him was a painful one.

He descended the last ridge, picking his way among the silent dead, and spade in hand strode down the slope towards the bank of the Zadora, where Moreno fell.

Yes, that was the spot. He remembered it well. The guide had just crossed the wooden bridge to the French side of the river, when the round shot from the battery on the hillside struck him. Verner could see the spot, for the moon was nearly full. He could see the long, narrow bridge of the Tres Puentes, and the dark waters of the Zadora River, silvered by the moonlight. As he reached the same spot early that morning the roar of the artillery was deafening. His ears were filled by the crash of the musket volleys and the yells of the charging troops. But all was silent now. The stillness was awe-inspiring where the dead men lay with their faces turned towards the sky.

And then, as he drew near to the spot where Moreno fell, a low sound broke the silence—the sound of a child sobbing.

Verner hurried forward to the place where he had left the dead guide, whose devotion had enabled the great Commander-in-Chief to throw that first handful of troops across the river and thus make the first step forward to the triumph at Vittoria.

The sobbing continued, soft and low, and as he drew near to the spot, the soldier saw the girl plainly. It was Juana.

She was sitting on the ground holding the dead man's head in her lap. Over his body she had drawn a heavy military cloak that some infantryman had thrown away to lighten his burden in the charge. She was keeping vigil over her dead.

"So you found him, Juana," said Verner, leaning on his spade as he looked down upon the Spanish girl. "How did you know that he was dead?"

"He did not come home to me, senor," said the girl, simply. She had recognised Verner at once. "So I came to look for him."

"And what are you going to do now?" asked Verner.

"I do not know, senor," said the girl through her tears. My father always took care of me since my mother died. And now he is dead also. I have no other relatives. But I shall pray to the good God, and He will send someone to take care of me."

Verner was troubled in his heart. Juana was so young, so lonely, and so helpless, that it was absolutely necessary that someone should look after her—and someone of her own sex if possible. The only woman with whom Verner had any real acquaintance was Mrs. Biddy Flynn. He made up his mind to ask Mrs. Flynn to take the Spanish orphan girl under her experienced wing.

He looked down at the dead man and then at the white face and large, dark eyes of Juana, who had

ceased to weep. He tapped the handle of his spade significantly.

Juana rose to her feet. "It is to bury my father," she said, quietly. "Thank you, senor; it is good of you." There were no more tears now. Indeed, the girl displayed a firmness and resolution that showed her to be a worthy daughter of her brave father.

So Verner dug a deep grave on the battlefield close to the Bridge of the Tres Puentes, and there he and Juana buried the heroic guide on the spot where he fell, and Juana knelt by the grave and said a prayer for the repose of her father's soul, while Verner stood bareheaded beside her. It was past midnight when the girl rose from her knees and placed her hand in Verner's. "Senor," she said, "I prayed to the good God to send someone to help me. He has sent you."

Day was breaking, and Mrs. Flynn, who had made the best of her way on her burro in the wake of the army, and had speedily discovered the bivouac of Terence's battalion, was just busying herself in boiling a kettle at the camp fire for a much needed cup of "tay" when she became aware of a stranger in the lines of the battalion.

Looking up from her kettle, she saw Private Verner leading a raw-boned commissariat mule, that carried instead of a saddle a sack partly filled with hay. And on the sack sat the prettiest girl that Mrs. Flynn had seen since she left Connemara, a girl with large, dark, tired eyes that turned instinctively towards Verner's tall, soldierly figure.

"Shure, where did ye get her at all, at all?" asked Mrs. Flynn, who was thoroughly mystified.

"Her father is dead," said Verner. "He was killed while acting as guide to the troops. I promised him before he died that I would look after Juana. I want you to help me, Mrs. Flynn."

"Shure an' I will do ut with a heart and a half," responded Mrs. Flynn, briskly. "Ye can lave her to me, Verner. Faith, I can see that what the poor lamb

do be needin' is slape an' food. 'Tis meself that'll be after takin' care of her this minnit."

So Mrs. Flynn, from Connemara, opened her arms and her heart to dark-eyed Juana from the Spanish mountains, and the tired girl slipped in with a sigh of contentment. Whereupon Private Verner went off to the tent of the brigadier-general to report himself and to explain the reason of his absence.

Instead of the reprimand that he expected, he received a few words of warm commendation from General Brisbane, who was aware of the death of the brave guide, and expressed satisfaction at the news that Verner had buried the body.

"There's another small matter that I have to report, sir," said Verner, looking the general straight in the face.

"Well, Verner, out with it, man."

"I have brought Moreno's daughter into the lines, sir, and have left her in the care of Mrs. Flynn, the wife of your batman."

"The deuce you have, Verner!" ejaculated the brigadier, with some perplexity. "But was that quite necessary?"

"In my opinion, sir," said the soldier, "it was imperatively necessary. I gave her father my word of honor that if he died in the service of Lord Wellington and the British Army I would be personally responsible for seeing that his daughter was cared for."

General Brisbane was a religious man, a conscientious man, and a thoroughly honorable man, who was never in his life known to go back upon his plighted word. "In those circumstances, Verner," he said, "you did the right thing. I shall mention the matter to Lord Wellington myself, and in all probability some suitable provision will be made for the young woman in view of the great service rendered by her father."

Verner made no reply to that, except to salute the general. "Is that all, sir, for the present?" he asked.

"Yes, that is all for the present," said Brisbane, "but

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you look absolutely tired out, Verner. Go and have a few hours' sleep. I'll send Flynn for you when I want you."

So Private Verner, that silent and reserved man, whose past was an insoluble mystery to his comrades, went away to his own quarters in the great encampment and lay down and slept.

And when he slept he dreamed of dark-eyed Juana.

CHAPTER III.

THE CAMPAIGNING OF BIDDY FLYNN.

"See here now, me jool," said Biddy Flynn, when Juana awoke from a good sleep several hours later, and found her new friend beside her with a cup of coffee and a handful of biscuits, "ye must be after takin' thim goold earrings out av yer pretty ears, or wan of them murderin' blayguards av Portugee mule-teers will be tearin' 'em out an' robbin' ye entirely."

Juana looked at Biddy with a pathetic little smile. She did not understand a word of the Connemara dialect, but she recognised the kindly feeling that inspired the speech. She let Biddy take the big gold rings out of her ears, and Biddy made signs to her that they would be safely kept.

Talking all the time to her in her "sootherin' " way, Biddy helped the girl to dress herself in her white chemisette, her dark blue bodice laced outside, and her short-red skirt reaching to the knees. Thick woollen stockings and stout buckled shoes completed her costume.

Just as the girl finished dressing, a touzled head was poked in through the opening of the tent in which Mrs. Flynn had deposited her charge, and a pair of twinkling brown eyes surveyed the newcomer with interest.

"Och, come in here Anita, ye poor haythen, and help me to talk to this child of the battlefield, for I have only enough of the Spanish to curse the mulemen, and she haven't any English at all, at all." This was Biddy Flynn's ingenuous appeal, and in response to it Anita popped in very willingly, sat down cross-legged on the ground, and lighted her cigarette.

Anita was one of those girls of the country who had elected to follow the drum. She had allowed herself to be snapped up by an enterprising foot-soldier, who discovered her while he was engaged on a private foraging expedition. She was strictly loyal to her man, and was rather a favorite with Mrs. Flynn.

"Ax her is she willing to jine the battalion, for be this an' be that 'tis a harrd life, but if she don't come wid us I don't know what I'll do wid her at all at all."

So Anita, showing a set of perfect teeth in her very friendly smile, engaged Juana in rapid conversation, punctuated with puffs of her cigarette.

"She say she go where you go, Bidi," interpreted Anita; she verra happy wit' you. But she ask all ze time where is ze senor. I not know 'oo is ze senor."

"Av course ye wudn't, me girl. Shure, 'tis Verner, she's axin' for, the poor lamb. Him that's the ginerals' own secretary. 'Twas him that found her down on the battlefield' keenin' over her father's corpse, an' he brought her in on a mule an' gev her to me to take care of."

Anita's eyes sparkled with renewed interest. She proceeded to question Juana, discharging her interrogations with incredible velocity. Very quickly a red signal was hoisted in Juana's cheeks, showing that Anita, who had a keen eye for a romantic situation, had struck home with her questions.

"She say she make a prayer to ze good God to send somebody to take care of her when her fazzaire die," interrupted Anita, "and ze good God He send immediately Senor Verner. I ask her if she loves Senor Verner. She say she not know what is to love, but she is 'appy with Senor Verner, and her heart beats faster when he speak to her."

"Och! that's it, is it?" said Mrs. Flynn. "Well, the likes of you an' the likes of me, Anita, is quare company for such an innocent lamb; but if she's got to thravel

with the battalion, faix there's only the wan thing for ut."

"Wat you tink, Bidi?"

"Senor Verner must marry her, Anita, an' be this an' be that from the luk I saw him give her whin I tuk her away to me tint, I think he'll find it aisy an' plisint enough to have Juana for a wife, an' 'tis my belafe that a good wife she'll be to him too. So you can tell her that now."

Again Anita poured forth a flood of animated Spanish patois, until Juana, with her neck and cheeks suffused with blushes, half-laughing and half-crying, pushed her bold-eyed visitor out of the tent.

Biddy Flynn determined to arrange the whole matter. She would leave them alone for a week or so, until she was sure that the silent Verner really loved the girl, and then she would act decisively.

But one morning, just before the army marched out of Vittoria, Verner came to her in his abrupt way and spoilt all her good-natured scheming.

"Mrs. Flynn," she said, "I am going to marry Juana to-day at 12 o'clock. The new battalion chaplain will perform the ceremony in his tent. We shall be very glad if you and Terence will come and see us married."

It was a very quiet wedding, for Terence and Biddy were the only visitors. Biddy would have preferred a "praste," and she had her own private doubts as to the ability of the nervous little "Prodestan" to tie the knot securely. But the Rev. Mr. Tinkler, fresh from his country curacy in England, rose to the occasion and read the Marriage service with quite an air of authority. Verner had duly received his colonel's sanction to the marriage, which was also cordially approved of by Brigadier-General Brisbane.

Biddy and Terence both affixed their "marks" to the marriage lines as witnesses, writing not being a strong point with either of them, and they listened in wonderment, while the Reverend Mr. Tinkler addressed a few remarks on the mutual duties of the married state to

the bridge and bridegroom, quite oblivious of the fact that the bride did not understand a single word that he was saying.

After the ceremony there was an informal drinking of healths in the married women's quarters—between the ammunition bullocks and the transport mules—and Juana settled down very happily and contentedly in that new station of life to which it had pleased the good God and Senor Verner to call her.

There was plenty of hard fighting after Vittoria before the war was over, for Wellington pressed hard on the retreating French army.

General Brisbane, with the first brigade of Picton's division, was in the forefront of the fighting, and the newly married Verner fought side by side with Terence Flynn through the nine days' conflict in the Pyrenees, and afterwards in the battles at the Nivelle and the Nive on French soil, and at Orthez and Toulouse.

Then came the abdication of Napoleon at Fontainebleau, and the close of the war just ten months after the battle of Vittoria.

All through those ten months Juana followed the column, happy in the love of her tall, strong husband, who, though silent and reserved with others, found plenty to say to his lovely young wife, to whom he was most passionately devoted.

Biddy Flynn and Juana rode their burros side by side in the wake of the column, along with the other women attached to the brigade, all the way from Vittoria to Toulouse, camping every night with the troops. Verner was always sure of seeing the little white donkey that Juana rode plodding into camp alongside of Biddy's big mouse-coloured burro, and as the two wives sat with their husbands by the camp fire Biddy was accustomed to relate the adventures of the day, and to enlarge upon the hardships which attended the wife of a soldier.

"But shure," she would say, "bad an' all as it is

now, it isn't annything to what it was when I was along o' Mick Donovan, God rist his sowl."

"That'll do now, Biddy," said Terence, who was apt to show a bit of temper at times when the virtues of his predecessor were enlarged upon; "lave Mick Donovan rest in his grave."

"An' a good man he was to me, too," continued Biddy, ignoring the interruption. "Well, as I was sayin', 'tis a harrrd life for a woman, but cowl'd an' all an' tired an' all as I am this minnit, shure 'tis Hiven itself to what I wint through in the retrate to Corunna. Juana, me darlint, 'twud ha' made yer heart bleed to see them poor women that dropped an' died in the snow, for they cud not kape up with the arrmy; an' them that didn't die fell into the hands av the Frinch, and ten I don't know wat happened to them at all, at all."

And then Juana would look at Verner with a brave smile, which said as plainly as possible; "I know that my husband will protect me, and I do not fear any danger as long as he is with me." She was able to understand Mrs. Flynn's strange language fairly well now, but better still she understood Mrs. Flynn's warm and generous heart.

Sometimes Biddy would decide to make an early start and march ahead of the column, instead of at the rear of it, in order to have a fire lit and some food ready for Terence and Verner at the next bivouac. Juana would always go with her on the little white donkey. She was getting used to the life now, though at first the horde of women who accompanied the battalion terrified her, and without Biddy's strong arm and ready tongue to help her she would have fared ill with her youth and innocence in that extraordinary throng.

Englishwomen, Irishwomen and Scotchwomen who were the bona fide wives of men in the ranks were mixed up with Portuguese and Spanish girls whom the soldiers had picked upon the march, and who speedily acquired all the arts of the skilled campaigner. Their plundering and fighting and disregard of all discipline worried

the Provost Marshal more than the misdeeds of the worst offenders in the ranks, and occasionally the Provost Marshal asserted his authority.

As the usual four sat round their camp fire one evening at a bivouac in the Pyrenees, Biddy related the abominable conduct of the Provost Marshal.

"Me an' Juana, an' about forty of the gurls were ridin' ahead av the column this mornin'," she said, "an' the thrack was so narrer an' curly that the dunkeys blocked the pass intirely. I looked behind me, an' there was the battalion comin' up the pass wid the band playin'. 'Millia murther!' sez I. 'Shure, we can't get on, the way the women hev got the thrack jammed,' sez I, 'an' the battalion will be blocked behind us, an' the whole of the army wid Wellington and the Shtaff will be blocked, too,' sez I. So I called out to the gurls in front to push on, or we'd be kilt intirely, when I seen the Provost Marshal an' his gyard beyant."

"Shure, what wud he be doin', annyway?" inquired Terence.

"He calls out," said Biddy, "'You women were ordhered to kape in the rare, and I'll tache you to obey ordhers in the future.' An' wid that he gives a wurrud of command to his min; an' what does the blaygards do but stip out an' shoot three of them poor dunkeys dead. Judy Callaghan an' Mary Murphy, an' Anita, the Spanish gurl, were ridin' dunkeys, an' the three of them pitched into the road wid all their pots and pans on top of thim. An' och, murther! Ye niver heard such cussin' of the Provost Marshal, the durty spy of the camp. Bad cess to him. But the road was cleared, and the three gurls came along wid us on fut loaded up wid their baggage an' cryin' and cursin' like their hearts was bruk. Me and Juana helped to carry their bits of things, didn't we, Juana?"

Juana nodded and looked at Biddy admiringly. Her protectress was extraordinarily efficient. No contingency found her unprepared or resourceless. Moreover,

Juana had picked up a kind of English from Biddy, and she spoke her remarkable diction with surprising fluency.

"And see also my Henry," she said to her husband; "the good Bidi, she is strong like a boule-dogue. She say to me 'Juana, take care of dat Portugee spalpino, Gomez. I no like one look in his eye. So by an' bye dat spalpino was dronk, oh very mooch dronk. 'E come by me. 'E try to put his arm round me, an' I cry at once 'Bidi!' At once comes Bidi running wit a bucket av water, very hot, an' she throw it over ze durty spalpino, Gomez, an och, be Jasus, he runs off like ze devil was behind 'im.'"

Terence roared with laughter at Juana's serious and dramatic recital of her peril and of the rescue effected by his adored Bidi, but Verner's brow grew black. The "spalpino" Gomez would certainly have a bad time if he ever happened to cross the path of Private Verner.

When a battle was expected, Flynn and Verner would take leave of their wives with serious faces. To Biddy these leave-takings were nothing. She was inured to them, but poor Juana used to get terribly upset. She cried her eyes out every day in the Pyrenees, and afterwards at the Nivelles and the Nive. Then it was that Biddy Flynn showed that she had a true, womanly heart under the rough great coat that she had picked up on a fire-swept ridge outside Vittoria and invariably wore when on the march.

"There now, alannah," she would say, taking the little Spanish bride in her capable arms, "don't be cryin', asthore, for faix the bullet isn't mowlded that ud har-rum that great long, lanky Verner, an' shure enough ye'll see him this night in the bivouac. An' haven't you the great news to tell him intirely."

Then Juana would smile, though her face was very white. She found it hard work marching behind the army those days. She needed all the care and kindness that Biddy Flynn could give her.

On April 18th, 1814, when the Peninsular Army was

at Toulouse, the news of Napoleon's abdication arrived, and hostilities ceased.

On the same evening, Juana's baby was born in a tent in the lines of the battalion. The regimental surgeon and Biddy Flynn both declared that they had never seen a finer child.

A proud and loving husband was Henry Verner, as he held Juana's hand while the roar of the field guns that saluted the end of the war reverberated through the camp, and Juana, with the child beside her, looked up into her husband's bronzed and furrowed face with an expression of ineffable love.

"It's all right, darling," said Verner. "The brigadier himself has promised to stand godfather to the boy. Little Tom Verner will make a fine soldier some day."

"Arrah, how could he help it," interjected Biddy, who was arranging the blankets of the narrow camp bed on which Juana lay, "an' him a-followin' the army before he was born."

CHAPTER IV.

OFF TO AUSTRALIA.

In the six years that followed the abdication of Napoleon, many important events occurred.

In the first place, Tom Verner attained his sixth birthday, which he spent in the company of his father and mother and little sister at Brisbane House, Largs, Ayrshire, where Henry Verner was retained in the capacity of secretary. At the close of the war, Major-General Brisbane was made a K.C.B. So, Henry Verner, who had gone with Sir Thomas Brisbane to Canada, when that distinguished officer went there and commanded a brigade at Plattsburg, missed being present at Waterloo—an abiding disappointment to him. Brisbane, hurrying back to join Wellington's army, when he heard of Napoleon's escape from Elba, arrived too late. Waterloo had just been fought. But his distinguished friend, whose acquaintance he had made many years before in the Galway hunting-field, did not forget him, and Major-General Sir Thomas Brisbane commanded a division in the British Army of Occupation in France. He sent Henry Verner back to Ayrshire to rejoin Juana and his little son, who were attached to the household during his absence in Canada.

Juana received her husband, whom the good God had sent to her on the battlefield of Vittoria, with all the passionate joy of her warm Spanish heart, and little Tom surveyed his father with wide-eyed approval, crowing lustily. So the years passed quietly and happily until little Tom was six years old. But Henry Verner, in spite of his happiness, could not forget the endless variety and adventure of those old campaigning days.

He often found himself wondering what would be the next move of that distinguished soldier and man of science, Sir Thomas Brisbane, for he had a strong impression that wherever Brisbane went his secretary would go too.

It was not long after little Tom Verner's sixth birthday that Sir Thomas Brisbane, walking in Paris one summer morning on the boulevard, happened to meet his old friend the Duke of Wellington, who took his arm very cordially and walked along with him, while the passers-by turned their heads to see the famous Duke strolling arm in arm with one of his generals.

"Ah, Brisbane," said the Duke, "Othello's occupation's gone. The army is to go back to England, and we are to go back with it. Well, we've seen some great days together—you and I, but there's no more campaigning for us now. What do you propose to do with yourself?"

"I confess to you, your Grace, that I should like very much to serve His Majesty the King in any situation where my experiences and abilities, such as they are, may be of value.

"Ah, there's the rub, Brisbane. Now that there is no more fighting to be done, it will not be easy to find employment for all the officers who are anxious to serve His Majesty. But, have you any particular opportunity in mind?"

"Well, your Grace, since you ask me, I must be frank with you. I learn that the governorship of New South Wales is likely to be vacant shortly, and if without displacing anybody else from such an honorable situation. I should be considered worthy of it, I should be proud to serve His Majesty in that capacity."

"Ha, very good. And how is the astronomy getting on?"

"Excellently, your Grace, but I can assure you that I never allow it to interfere with my military duties."

"Of course not, Brisbane; of course not. By the way, do you remember the crest of that ridge where Reille

made his last stand outside Vittoria, and how I found you when the stormers had carried the hill standing on the summit admiring the scenery?"

"I have not forgotten it, your Grace."

"And as you looked round while our fellows were still in hot pursuit of Marshal Jourdan, on the Salvatierra road, you exclaimed to me 'What a glorious site for an Observatory.' Egad, Brisbane, the ruling passion, you know. You'll have to beware of it."

Sir Thomas Brisbane was secretly amazed at his distinguished friend's power of intuition. How had the Duke of Wellington guessed the secret ambition of his heart which was to make a thorough astronomical study of the southern heavens that had been very imperfectly studied by Lacaille from the Cape of Good Hope, but save for that single observer, formed a virgin field for the astronomer? Brisbane gloated secretly over the prospect of watching and classifying the constellations of the Southern Hemisphere—never adequately observed before. He almost hated Lacaille for having, however incompletely, forestalled him.

It was the Southern Cross that specially fascinated Sir Thomas Brisbane. He felt its lure. He confessed to his own heart that but for the chance of observing the Southern Cross—so imperfectly charted by that impostor, Lacaille—the thought of going to New South Wales would never have occurred to him.

It was the Southern Cross that drew him on.

And so, the Duke, after shaking his old friend warmly by the hand, went off chuckling to keep his appointment with a very great lady, and Sir Thomas Brisbane resumed his walk alone, wrapped in entrancing mathematical meditations, concerning his famous method of determining the time with accuracy from a series of altitudes of the sun taken on the same side of the meridian.

But, a few weeks later he met the Duke again, and the Duke informed him that Earl Bathurst had told him that he wanted a governor to rule the earth and not the heavens. However, Earl Bathurst had eventually de-

cided to appoint him, and he was to go out to New South Wales at once.

Sir Thomas Brisbane was highly delighted, and expressed his thanks in the somewhat formal diction that was habitual to him.

"Why, d—— it all, man," said the Duke, genially, "one must not forget one's friends. Good luck to you, and remember that I have told Bathurst that I hold myself personally responsible for you.

And so it came about that in May, 1821, Sir Thomas Brisbane, with Lady Brisbane, to whom he had been married not very long before, and their infant daughter and her ladyship's sister, Miss Makdougall, and their personal belongings, and Sir Thomas's staff, and his two assistant astronomers and his astronomical instruments, and finally his assistant-secretary, Henry Verner, with Juana and their two children, were all embarked in the merchant ship "Royal George," Captain Pondite, then lying in the Thames, and sailed from England bound for New South Wales, arriving in Sydney harbour five months later.

Sending a swift glance back across the intervening years one descries the Royal George lying at anchor in Sydney Cove, while the guns at Dawes Point battery discharge their welcoming salute, and Lieutenant-Governor Erskine, in the absence of Governor Macquarie, who is travelling in the northern settlements, goes forth in his pinnace to receive the new governor.

Tom Verner, now seven years of age, holding his small sister by the hand, observes with intense interest the arrival of the pinnace and the appearance of Lieutenant-Governor Erskine, brilliant in scarlet and gold lace. Yet not half so brilliant as Sir Thomas Brisbane, who, after being secluded for more than an hour in his state-room, appears on deck in the full uniform of a Major-General, K.C.B., with a big sword that Tom Verner regards with veneration mixed with envy.

Sir Thomas majestically signifies his intention to make his official landing on the following morning, and en-

gages the Lieutenant-Governor in conversation on the state of the Colony, whilst her ladyship and her sister, Miss Makdougall, survey the coast and the buildings along the foreshore with disconsolate apprehensions writ large in their troubled eyes.

Henry Verner is down in his cabin, busy with official correspondence, but Juana is on deck with the children. She is a different Juana now from the blushing girl in her father's cottage in the valley of the Zadora River. A beautiful young matron of 24, she is the pride of Henry Verner's life, and with the marvellous adaptability of women, she suits herself without effort to each new phase of her ever-changing environment. She speaks English fluently now—with a slight Scotch accent, contracted in Ayrshire, though at rare intervals some word suggestive of Biddy Flynn and Connemara still makes its appearance.

This clear atmosphere, in which the outlines of the buildings and the contours of the hills around the harbour stand out so sharply cut, remind her of her native Spain. This blue sky is very like the sky of Andalusia, and not at all like the grey and misty sky of Ayrshire. Juana's heart warms already towards her new home. Home for her is truly where the heart is, and her heart is with Henry Verner, the man whom the good God sent to her at Vittoria, and who has brought her out over unimagined leagues of sea to this new country, where the white buildings stand out against the blue sky just as they used to do in Spain, and where the wind that laughs along the water is sun-warmed like the breeze of the Mediterranean.

Next morning, at 10 o'clock, the guns at Dawes-point battery give tongue again as soon as Sir Thomas Brisbane steps into the boat that is to take him ashore along with Lady Brisbane and all his household and retainers. Little Tom Verner counts the number of guns in the salute. He feels a personal pride in every one of them, and there are nineteen in all.

Stepping ashore at the private landing place at Bin-

nalong Point, Sir Thomas is received by the Lieutenant-Governor, and the whole party walk the short distance up to Government House, where they are received by Mrs. Macquarie on behalf of Governor Macquarie, who is not yet returned from the northern settlements.

Mrs. Macquarie is most gracious, and shakes hands with all the ladies, including Juana, while little Tom Verner at once rushes to the lawn, where the band of the Forty-eighth Regiment is playing the martial music that his small soul loves, for little Tom is every inch a soldier.

Then, at the request of Sir Thomas, the gates of Government House grounds are thrown open in order that the Australian public may come in and he may make their acquaintance. Thus Tom Verner, among the rest of the party, has his first glimpse of the Australian public, and fraternises with them merrily. But he goes back at frequent intervals to talk to the bandsmen of the Forty-eighth Regiment or the sentries on duty in their sentry boxes. The quarter in which all his interest is engaged is quite plain.

In the afternoon carriages were brought round, and the whole of Sir Thomas Brisbane's large party journeyed out to Parramatta to take up their abode there in the fine Government House that had been completed three years before to take the place of the first unpretentious structure built by Governor Phillip at Rosehill.

The mounted escort followed by the carriages clattered into George-street at a canter, and then settled down to a steady trot for the journey in front of them. Passing along the street where every shop bore its sign as well as every public house, the escort soon left the Rose and Crown in George-street north, behind them. An important place was the Rose and Crown, for the four-horsed stage coach for Parramatta started from its front door in great style, with the driver cracking his whip and the guard blowing his long coach-horn.

Governor Brisbane, surveying the scene from the carriage window, was not greatly impressed by it, and Lady

Brisbane and her sister, Miss Makdougall, were frankly steeped in melancholy. The objects of interest along the route were few. They saw the two small pottery furnaces at the brickfields without emotion. Even the handsome Gothic gateway, through which the tollbar was approached, left them cold, and they refused to show the slightest signs of enthusiasm over Brickfield Farm, which belonged to the Government, the homestead being surrounded with handsome grounds, in which golden wattles bloomed luxuriantly. Lieutenant Stirling, the young officer of the Buffs, who occupied a seat in the Governor's carriage for the purpose of supplying him with local knowledge, pointed out the various objects of interest along the route, but Lady Brisbane sniffed, and Miss Makdougall steadily refused to be comforted. Even the country house of the late Colonel Johnstone, with its fine avenue of tall tapering Norfolk pines, failed to move them, and they listened with resignation to the story of Colonel Johnstone's famous coup d'état by which he deposed Governor Bligh and took over the government of the territory himself.

Not by such scanty features of interest in the depressing landscape of this new country could two ladies from Ayrshire be beguiled into acquiescing with any other feeling than one of deep melancholy in the mysterious dictates of Providence which had brought them to this remote country, where members of the Presbyterian Church were few, and far between, and where red-faced, rum-drinking officers and their wives were almost the only society.

They could see nothing to admire even in Underwood's Inn, eight miles out, where the stage coach changed horses, and they sniffed critically at Mrs. Darcy Wentworth's fine mansion, Homebush, with its surrounding park of 1,000 acres of cleared land. Thank goodness, they reached the Parramatta tollbar at last, and from the top of the hill saw the whole town spread before them. The sight of the Church of England church, with its steeple, was not pleasing to Miss Makdougall,

and she directed a glance that was positively hostile towards the Rev. Samuel Marsden's fine brick house, which crowned the rising ground to the left, surrounded by clumps of trees. More tolerant was her gaze when she looked upon the rows of neat detached cottages, each standing in its garden, and upon the considerable number of two-storey residences, built with taste, and suggesting possibilities of social intercourse.

The Governor's cavalcade clattered past "The Golden Fleece," which was then the principal inn at Parramatta, and stopped at last at Government House.

The mansion at which Governor Brisbane looked with satisfaction on that lovely summer evening, and which was surveyed with obvious misgivings by Lady Brisbane and her sister, the long-visaged, melancholy and deeply religious Miss Makdougall, was a substantial structure, designed by Lieutenant Watts and built of stone three feet thick. The rooms were large and lofty, particularly the dining-room and the ball-room, and the guard-room and offices at the back.

In the plans of those early military architects, nothing is more remarkable than the careful provision which was made for the convenient bestowal of ample supplies of liquor. Lieutenant Watts, the designer of the Parramatta Government House, was evidently of the opinion that the official occupants of the residence would be great toppers. All the ground under the house was excavated, and in the excavated space huge cellars were constructed, with bins for the reception of multitudinous bottles. Also there were "horses" of wood in the cellars to support many barrels of beer and spirits.

Tom Verner, making a delightful tour of exploration with Aileen, immediately upon his arrival, discovered the brick steps leading from the courtyard into the cellars, and promptly descended into the depths. A gorgeous place for all manner of games, but it was so dark that one bumped one's head against the barrels. Aileen, clasping him lightly by the hand, dragged him out, much against his will, from the fascinating catacombs designed

by Lieutenant Watts for the reception of the vice-regal liquor.

Next morning there were other delightful explorations to make. Tom and Aileen sallied forth, hand in hand, and, climbing the hill, discovered the wonderful bath-house that had been erected for the ablutions of His Excellency and his household. There was a big tank on the top of the bath-house, supplied by pipes, through which water was forced by pumping.

Tom was examining the tank with keen interest, and was privately speculating on the possibility of being able to climb up and look into it when he heard voices just round the angle of the little building.

"I tink dis vill do alretty, eggselently, Sir," bomed a voice, which Tom recognised at once as that of Mr. Rumcker, the Chief Assistant Astronomer, whom Brisbane had brought out, together with the second assistant, Mr. James Dunlop, in the Royal George, from England.

"A varra guid place. I canna thenk that ye can better it, Sir Tawmas," added Mr. Dunlop.

"I am quite of your opinion," said the Governor. "I shall give instructions to-day to have the building of the Observatory commenced on this site at once."

The two children scuttled away down the hill, as soon as they heard the Governor. But Tom was quite thrilled at the prospect of assisting informally at the construction of the Observatory. Mr. James Dunlop, in an expansive moment on board ship, had promised to let him see the man in the moon through his big telescope as soon as the Observatory was built.

CHAPTER V.

THE SOUTHERN CROSS CALLS.

So in due course the Observatory was built close to the bath-house. It was a small rectangular building with two domes. The north and the south sides had five windows each, but there were no windows on the other sides.

Tom Verner peeped in when the building was finished, and all the astronomical instruments that Governor Brisbane had brought out with him were installed. The inquisitive urchin saw that the interior of the building was divided into two halves by a cross-wall. Strange objects, of which Tom knew neither the name nor the use were installed in place. A great achromatic telescope 46 inches long, through which one might easily see the man in the moon, was placed under the south dome, and a repeating circle under the north dome. There was a transit instrument in place, an eight-day clock keeping sidereal time, and other strange and fascinating objects. Also there were Mr. Rumcker and Mr. Dunlop, who abused little Tom Verner angrily in their respective dialects whenever they caught him meddling with their precious instruments.

Soon after the Observatory was finished, and Governor Brisbane had entered upon the entrancing task of observing the stars in the southern heavens, instead of worrying over the distracting quarrels between the "exclusives" and the "emancipists" that formed the politics of the time, little Tom Verner experienced another delightful surprise. He acquired a little brother.

Juana was just as proud of her son, who was born under the Southern Cross, as of her firstborn, who saw

the light amid the thunder of the guns at Toulouse, and her husband who was kept busy with the private scientific correspondence of the Governor—his official correspondence being handled by his official private secretary, Major Ovens, was equally delighted.

“What name shall we give to this little ‘spalpino,’ ” asked Juana, her thoughts going back by the association of ideas to her firstborn, and then to Biddy Flynn, who had ministered to her.

“Why not call him Sydney, dearest,” said Verner, stroking his wife’s beautiful hair, “for he is our little Australian son.”

So Sydney it was.

Even as a baby Sydney Verner was fascinating above all other babies. Tom was a second edition of his father—adventurous, eager to see and do all that there was to be seen and done, but solid and steadfast, slow in forming his ideas, and earnest rather than brilliant in expressing them. Sydney had his mother’s graceful charm—the charm that had captivated Verner, and made even that hardened old campaigner, Biddy Flynn, her staunch friend and unwearying helper through the last year of the campaign. Little Sydney Verner was startlingly like his mother—a regular little Spanish baby. It was a pretty sight to see him when he was three years old, toddling about with his big brother, Tom, who adored him.

The place that the two children loved best of all was Governor Brisbane’s Observatory, which was built near the bath-house on the hill, and the Governor, with his kindly nature could not find it in his heart to deny them admittance.

Mr. Rumcker, the first assistant, having quarrelled with the Governor soon after the Observatory was opened, retired in great dudgeon to his fine farm, which he called “Stargard,” after his native place in Pomerania, and which was situated at “the Cow Pastures.” Consequently Mr. Dunlop became the officer-in-charge of the Observatory, under Governor Brisbane, and it was to

Mr. Dunlop that Tom and Sydney applied for permission to look through the big 46-inch achromatic telescope, in order that they might see the Man in the Moon.

They did not see the Man in the Moon, but they saw the starry heavens, including the Southern Cross, and it made a profound impression upon their youthful minds.

That dome of the Observatory was a real cave of magic, and the wizard who inhabited it was Mr. James Dunlop, Governor Brisbane's astronomer—a slenderly built man, clean-shaved, swarthy and pale, with piercing dark eyes. He wore a blue coat with brass buttons on it, and nankeen trousers. He showed Tom and little Syd. the wonders of the planets, and then the four principal stars of the Southern Cross, and neither of the boys ever forgot what they saw through that big achromatic telescope—big for those days—which Mr. Dunlop manipulated so carefully.

Jupiter, hanging in the dark sky, for all the world like an enormous pearl, with his four bright little moons around him, impressed the boys profoundly, and Tom was old enough to get a glimmering idea of the meaning of Mr. Dunlop's remarks on the subject.

"Heeh, laddie," said the Scotchman, with the light of enthusiasm in his piercing eye, "ye're seein' the noo what Galileo saw through the first telescope. Thenk of it, laddie, juist thenk of it. Jupiter was the first of the wonders of the nicht that Galileo pointed his new-made telescope at, an' the movement of those four wee bricht munes tellt to Galileo that Copernicus was right after a'. It was through obsairving yon great pearl of the nicht that Galileo learnt the truth about our airth, laddie—the truth that she moves round the Sun, instid of the Sun moving round her, as was falsely taught by the Church of that time. They would like to hae burnt Galileo, laddie, ay, as they burned Giordano Bruno, but they daurna. Yet 'tis said that they tortured him for telling what he saw in yon bricht globe, with the four

wee sma' munes around it, that ye are lukin' at this mennit, laddie." There was a tremor of profound emotion in Mr. Dunlop's voice.

Tom was only vaguely aware of the meaning of Mr. Dunlop's talk, but it excited him. There was something eerie and mysterious in this dome of metal plates, painted black, with its panels that were hauled up by cords running through pullies. Moreover, in that small circular chamber, the acoustic effects were startling, and even terrifying. When Mr. Dunlop spoke at the far side of the dome, his voice travelled round the circular wall and boomed into Tom's ears from behind him. Mr. Dunlop became to him and to little Syd. a Wizard of Darkness.

Little Syd. listened open-mouthed to the braw Scot's tongue, that boomed in his ears from behind, while he plainly saw Mr. Dunlop in his blue brass-buttoned coat and white nankeen trousers in front of him at the far side of the dome. The child's imagination was stimulated by the weird surroundings—and so was Tom's imagination also. They desired to see fresh wonders. So Mr. Dunlop showed them the Southern Cross.

Neither of them ever afterwards forgot that night in the little Observatory at Parramatta, when they saw the Southern Cross—at first pointed out to them low on the horizon, by the bony forefinger of Mr. Dunlop, and afterwards seen star by star through Mr. Dunlop's big achromatic telescope.

Mr. Dunlop pushed against a handle, and the whole of the black dome moved round in its bed until an aperture, formed by the raising of a panel, came opposite to the Southern Cross.

"Noo, Tom," he said, "ye canna see a' the five stars at once, laddie, forbye they winna gae upo' the objec' glass thegither. So we wull een hae to tak 'em ane by ane." He pointed the telescope on its stand and applied his eye to it. Then making room for Tom on the stool, which he had placed there for his personal convenience, he went on: "Yon's Alpha Crucis, twa stars that luik

like ane, a' bricht an' gletterin' like a bonnie big diamond."

Mr. Dunlop's telescope was not big enough to divide the binary into a triple star. Probably Governor Brisbane's astronomer, with his piercing dark eyes, never found out to the day of his death that Alpha Crucis is a triple star, and not a binary.

Then he turned the telescope upon Beta Crucis, the second white star of the Cross, and upon Gamma and Delta Crucis, the two red ones. Just above Beta, the sharp eyes of Tom Verner could make out through the glass innumerable faint points of coloured light. What he saw was Herschel's "Jewel Cluster," now known as Kassa Crucis. Long and earnestly Tom and little Syd. stared at the stars of the Southern Cross—that cross of fire that pointed to the south.

The two boys could not tear themselves away from that big telescope. One after the other they sat there with their eyes glued to the eye-piece, watching the coruscations of Alpha Crucis.

"Why are those stars called the Southern Cross, Mr. Dunlop?"

"Because they aye point to the South, laddie."

"If a boy was to walk away from here and go on and on, and keep them always in sight, where would he come to, Mr. Dunlop?"

"He micht come to a bad end, I'm thenkin'," responded Mr. Dunlop, cautiously.

"But if he didn't come to a bad end, where would he come to?" persisted Tom.

"I suppose he would come to the most southern part of Australia, laddie—the country that Mester Hume and Mester Hovell hae discovered on the ither side of that great river o' theirs—an' a fine country it is, too, they're tellin' me."

"I would like to follow the Southern Cross and go down and see that country," said Tom, the adventurous, as he took one last fond lingering look at Alpha Crucis.

"Me, too," said little Syd., with eyes wide open. "Me

go there with you, Tom.” He clasped his big brother by the hand. He had an idea that if he and Tom were to follow the great white star that Mr. Dunlop conjured up out of the night and placed at the end of his big telescope, they would reach a very pleasant land—a land of unknown delights—better perhaps even than Parramatta.

When Mr. Dunlop at last, with great difficulty, drove them off and sent them down to the big house where Juana put them to bed, they dreamed all night of the Southern Cross, and of the beautiful country and mysterious treasures that they would come to if they followed it.

Both Tom and little Syd. determined firmly to follow the Southern Cross as soon as they were big enough, and explore the unknown treasures of that land in the South, of which Mr. Dunlop, the Wizard of Darkness, had spoken.

CHAPTER VI.

PIONEERS OF THE WEST.

Governor Brisbane did not stay many years in Australia. He had not the brusque strength of character, the independence, the will power, the contempt for the opinions of those around him when they conflicted with his own, that marked his predecessor, Macquarie. To Brisbane, the perpetual attempts of the "Exclusionists"—that is to say, the official and military class—to retain all the wealth, power and influence of the territory in their own hands, were as ignoble as the unceasing efforts of the "Emancipists," with whom many of the free immigrants of small means and unofficial standing threw in their lot—to procure for themselves social recognition and a share in the lands that were being made available for settlement. The Governor was sick of the interminable wrangling between these two classes. His philosophic and scientific temper caused him to hold himself aloof from both of them as much as possible, and consequently he satisfied neither.

He was a great mathematician. He could tell the distance of Saturn from the earth with wonderful accuracy, but he could not make the revenue and the expenditure of the colony balance. He could predict the exact hour and minute when a transit of Venus across the sun's disc would begin, but he could not foretell that financial troubles would follow if he interfered with the currency, and that the smaller agriculturists would be ruined if the Government refused to buy more than three months' supply of wheat from them at a time, instead of buying the whole crop as previously.

Consequently the time came when Governor Brisbane

received a strong hint from certain persons in authority in England, that he had better return to London, but before he went he summoned his faithful clerk, Henry Verner, and disclosed to him his impending departure.

"Before I go, Verner," said the Governor, "I would like to feel that you and your family are comfortably settled here. If you will make a formal application to me for a grant of land, say, 5,000 acres, I shall be very glad to cause the grant to be made. I shall give you a letter to Mr. John Oxley, the Surveyor-General, instructing him to place you in possession of the land in any locality that you may select, provided there is land available. I consider that you are a most suitable person, from my personal knowledge of your steadiness and trustworthiness, to have a grant of land made to you."

Verner expressed his gratitude for this mark of consideration, and before the Governor, with his wife and family—including a son and a daughter, both born at Parramatta—sailed for England, Mr. John Oxley was obliged, much against his will, to deal with Henry Verner's application—granted by the Governor—for 5,000 acres of land.

Verner and Juana had long and anxious consultations as to the district in which they should choose their estate.

"I do not like this Parramatta, dear one," said Juana. "It is in the hollow, closed in by the small hills. It is so hot here in the summer. It is not good for the children; see how white they become."

"Then, where would you like to live, Juana?"

"Ah, my Harry, have you forgotten where you found me? In the mountains. I was born in the mountains, and I would like to breathe the mountain air again—to remind me always of my mountain home in the Valley of the Zadora, where I first saw you."

"We might try the Western tableland," said Verner, thoughtfully. "I believe that there is a fine climate up there, and splendid soil. I'll see the Surveyor-General about it."

"The Surveyor-General was almost rude when Verner presented his application for 5,000 acres of land, bearing a minute from Governor Brisbane, ordering that the required number of acres should be allotted to him in whatever locality he might solicit, so long as land was available there. Mr. John Oxley was in two minds whether he would not tear up the application, in spite of the fact that it bore the Governor's signature. But after brief reflection he consented surlily to carry out the business, although he considered it most reprehensible on the part of the Governor to make a grant of land to a mere dependent. A thorough going "Exclusionist" was Mr. John Oxley, with all the prejudices of his class deeply ingrained in his nature.

"Where do you want this land?" he inquired ungraciously.

"I should like it, if possible, on the Western tableland, Sir, on account of the good climate there," replied Verner, with military precision and directness.

"Umph!" Mr. John Oxley grunted. Evidently this man knew what he was talking about. He drew out a large map and spread it on the table in front of him. "How would the Macquarie River suit you?" he asked, reflecting safely that if this undesirable person had to have 5,000 acres of land, it would be just as well to locate him as far away from Sydney as possible.

Verner looked at the large-scale survey-map, upon which Mr. John Oxley pointed out the Macquarie River with his pencil. The country along the Macquarie appeared to be desirable land. Mountain ranges were indicated by criss-cross lines, but in several places Mr. Oxley, in his neat caligraphy, had written the words "rolling downs," and the region was intersected by a network of creeks running into the main stream or into its tributaries.

Scanning the map with a practised and understanding eye, Verner indicated a place marked "rolling downs," a little to the North-west of Bathurst. The Downs were near several creeks that flowed into the Macquarie. "I

should like my land there, Sir, if it can be managed," he said.

Mr. Oxley grunted again. "Very good, Mr. Verner, I will look into the matter, and let you know in due course."

The matter was arranged sooner than Verner had anticipated.

Governor Brisbane treated his faithful henchman very generously, and just before sailing for England with his wife and family, he made Verner a handsome present of money, wherewith to buy stock for his land. Verner attended the famous valedictory banquet which was given to Sir Thomas Brisbane by the Emancipists, at Andrew Nash's "Woolpack Inn, at Parramatta, and two days afterwards he and Juana said good-bye to the generous patron with whom they had been so long associated, and together with sturdy little Tom, and blue-eyed Aileen, and Sydney, the baby, turned their faces towards the West.

To Juana, the loneliness and the silence of the illimitable solitudes that spread before them as soon as they lost sight of the spire of Parramatta church were terrifying. But one glance at her confident, resolute husband reassured her. With him she was ready to face whatever this wild new country had in store for her. She sat in the bullock dray, which was covered in with stout canvas as a protection against the weather, and which lumbered slowly forward, carrying the Verner family and all their possessions towards the Macquarie River, 140 miles away.

Along with them went a couple of hundred sheep, mostly breeding ewes, and a few head of horned cattle. Verner rode beside the dray on a useful looking stock horse, and his three assigned servants marched on foot. The expedition camped at Penrith for the first night, and tackled Lapstone Hill next morning. Slowly it crawled along, seldom accomplishing more than nine or ten miles between dawn and dark.

Sitting round the camp fire at night, when the chil-

dren had been put to sleep in the dray, Juana and her husband recalled again their old campaigning experiences. Sleeping under the dray, wrapped in their blankets, they awoke before the dawn, having heard through their dreams the bugle calls of long ago. But when they peered out there was no sleeping army round them. Nothing but the interminable trees and the three men stretched out in front of the embers of the camp-fire, and the sheep cropping the scanty native herbage beside the track.

A week out from Parramatta they reached Mount York, and saw on their left a huge and formless mass of sandstone that Verner, with his skeleton-map in front of him, identified with a thrill.

"Guess what that mountain over there to the left is called," he whispered to Juana.

"Oh, my dear, I cannot tell," said Juana, "but tell me then, my Harry."

"Mount Vittoria," said Verner in a tense whisper. "They named it after our Vittoria—in honour of that great battle, dearest, that began on the Zadora River and ended in the Spanish city."

Juana covered her face with her hands and went down on her knees beside the track. Turning towards this new Vittoria in a strange land, she said a prayer for the repose of the soul of her brave father, who lay in the grave where she had placed him near the old Vittoria, so far away in Spain. And Henry Verner stood bare-headed beside her as twelve years earlier he had stood bare-headed while the child of the battlefield prayed at the grave by the Bridge of the Tres Puentes.

After passing Wallerawang, the working bullocks were stampeded at dawn by a mob of wild scrub cattle that thundered down the hillside like an avalanche. For a few moments it seemed as though the intruders would sweep over the encampment and annihilate the whole party.

But Verner, prompt as ever in action, sprang into the saddle and charged the wild mob with his stock-

whip. Swerving from that biting lash, they swept away from the bullock dray and vanished with thunder of hoofs and splintering of timber, into the bush. It took a couple of hours to round up the working bullocks when the mad charge was over.

On the sixteenth day after leaving Parramatta, Juana and her husband saw the swamp oaks that fringed the bank of the Macquarie River, and on the seventeenth Verner entered into possession of his fine estate—5000 acres of rich, well-watered park land—close to which ran an unnamed creek that was one day to become famous.

The family lived on the bullock dray while Verner and the three men built the first little house of logs, roofed with bark. Later on Verner built a neat stone bungalow, set in a fenced enclosure, adorned with native shrubs and flowers.

In their new surroundings more than 2000 feet above sea level, Juana renewed her girlish bloom, and the three children grew as hardy as the young saplings. Little Aileen kept close to her mother for the most part, but Tom and Syd. roamed far afield with their father. There was always some new and delightful adventure to engage in, some fresh and entrancing sight to see on the hills and plains around "Coonara," the native name for the hill behind the house. Verner discovered that the name meant "Bright Outlook," and he promptly adopted it as the name of his fine estate, which was a lonely spot, many miles distant from Bathurst, which lay to the south-east.

Within easy distance of the homestead was a small creek, which was a tributary of a larger one. The larger one ran into the Macquarie River, which was called by the blacks "Wambool," meaning "the meandering one." But the creeks were at that time unnamed.

Tom and Sydney Verner, following the little creek down to its junction with the larger one, found there a swimming pool, and many a time on the hot summer days the lads used to paddle in the stream that carried be-

neath its shining water that which was to change the history of Australia.

A natural protector—that was Tom. He kept a sharp eye on little Syd., and was always ready with a helping hand in the time of need. Little Syd. had a knack of getting into trouble, and it was invariably Tom who got him out of it.

When the little fellow slid into the deep swimming pool in the creek while he was sailing his boat made of a chip of bark in the shallows, Tom heard his scream that ended in a gurgle, and, running at top speed to the bank, dived in where he saw the boy's rough straw hat floating on the surface. Little Syd. was a long way down when Tom reached him and dragged him up again. And when they got home Juana wept over both of them, and Verner patted Tom's head with an approving "Well done, little son," that was music in his ears.

Then there was the eventful day when the new bull, which had just been bought and brought home from the Government cattle run at Bathurst, came charging down the paddock with head lowered at little Syd. Syd. was fully fifty yards from the fence, and he started to run as fast as his fat legs would carry him, but the bull was travelling like a locomotive, and Juana, who was watching from the verandah, screamed in agony.

Tom caught the cry, and saw what had happened. Without even a stick in his hand, he dashed to the rescue, and, running in between Syd. and the bull, distracted the animal's attention with loud shouts. The bull changed his objective at once, and made after this new and audacious intruder, leaving little Syd. to scramble breathlessly through the fence. The gallant Tom having achieved his object, and drawn off the pursuing enemy from his small brother, started for safety himself.

But he was too late. The bull caught him, and with one vigorous butt bore him forward and upward. By a miracle the animal's horns missed the boy, one going on each side of him, but the bony forehead hit him like

a battering ram, and with a prodigious lift hoisted him clean over the stout four-rail fence. The wind was knocked out of Tom Verner when he fell, but not the pluck, and when his father and the three "Government men" arrived with pitchforks he advanced with them to the attack, armed with a heavy stockwhip, and gave the bull such a merciless hiding that the animal never charged again.

Never was an elder brother more devoted to a younger one than was Tom to little Syd. The two boys roamed together over the lovely rolling uplands, clothed with sweet-scented Kangaroo grass. Every valley was knee-high in luscious herbage, and Verner's sheep and cattle fattened and increased both in the ranges and on the plains.

When Syd. was still a little fellow he was hoisted upon a horse, and watched his father and Tom and the three men mustering the cattle each day, "a wonder and a wild delight."

He learned to like the taste of the wild berries on the warria bushes, and when he was thirsty he drank the water from the "gilgais" or shallow pools in the rocks. Also, when Tom took out his gun, there would be parrot for dinner—parrot grilled on dry branches of the scented gum trees, and eaten with the delicious damper that Tom could bake so well in the embers of the wood fire.

Those were dinners to be long remembered, for they were eaten in the shade of the river-oaks that fringed the Lewis Ponds Creek, which was called after the Rev. F. Lewis, the first Wesleyan Minister who went to Bathurst. And the Lewis Ponds Creek was destined to be famous in Australian history.

Tom and Syd. ate their parrot and damper sitting—though they did not know it—on golden ground.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW LITTLE SYD. WAS LOST AND FOUND.

The country lying at the back of Henry Verner's land was rough and rangy—difficult country to find one's way in. Juana got a terrible fright when little Syd. was lost there during her husband's absence in Bathurst, where he had gone to buy some cattle from the Government run. It all happened simply, and yet, as it seemed, inevitably.

George Collins and his friend Con. Burke had ridden over from Pretty Plains station in the afternoon to warn Verner that wild blacks were showing signs of unusual restlessness. They found that Verner was not at home, but the hospitable Juana speedily made them forget their disappointment, for she invited them into the house and set before them watermelon, and rockmelon, nectarines, and cool drinks. Tom was away in the horse paddock, and little Syd. was playing round the verandah.

Mr. Collins often rode over to Coonara. In those wild solitudes it was a real treat to meet such a beautiful and simple-natured woman as Mrs. Verner, and George Collins thoroughly enjoyed talking to her. As for his friend, Mr. Con. Burke, that impetuous young Irishman, fell head over ears in love with Juana the moment he saw her. He had heard a vague hint of her romantic history from Collins, and the reality of her warm Spanish beauty fired his imagination at once.

The two of them sat on the verandah talking to their lovely hostess, and they found plenty to say to her. Mr. Burke in particular was full of questions, and would not be satisfied until Juana had told him the whole story

of the Bridge of the Tres Puentes, the death of her brave father, and the dramatic appearance of Henry Verner, spade in hand, on the battlefield at midnight, in answer to her prayer to the good God to send a helper to her.

The sun had set before Mr. Burke's romantic interest in the adventures of the "child of the battlefield," as Biddy Flynn called her, was half satisfied. The two young men rose to go and get their horses—and Juana looked round for little Syd.

Little Syd. was nowhere to be seen.

Juana ran round the house calling for the child, with cries that became more and more like sobs. Mr. Collins and Mr. Burke coo-eeed loud and long.

No answer came from the plains in front, or from the densely wooded hills behind the homestead. As they were still coo-eeing, Henry Verner rode up with his eldest son Tom, whom he had met in the horse paddock, and brought along with him.

Juana, half distracted with terror, burst out into passionate self-denunciation, wringing her hands. "Oh, my Harry," she sobbed, "it is all my fault. I was talking to these gentlemen and I did not watch the little one. He has wandered away in the great forest, and now he is lost."

But Verner, with his prompt and resolute character tempered like fine steel by years of campaigning, lost not a second in useless repining. He issued rapid orders to Mr. Collins and Mr. Burke, and calling Tom to follow him, galloped off towards the belt of light scrub that gradually merged into heavy timber higher up the range.

Burke was despatched to fetch two black stockmen, who were skilled trackers, from his own station, and Collins was bidden to round up the neighbouring run-holders and let them know that the child was lost. Verner knew well that they would respond to the call. It was imperative to find the boy as soon as possible. Verner thought with a shudder of the wild blacks. He also thought of the dingoes. They had killed many of his sheep lately.

He felt an icy tremor at his spine when his brain framed an instantaneous picture of little Syd. stumbling along through the immense solitude and darkness of the bush until his chubby legs could go no further, and then sinking exhausted at the foot of one or other of those tens of thousands of mighty trees that loomed up in front of him.

Verner could almost see the yellow eyes of the dingoes as they drew closer and closer to the wearied child. By a stern effort of will he blotted out the picture, and concentrated his brain on the immense task of finding his son before it was too late.

The night set in cold and dark. Juana, alone in the house, spent it on her knees praying to the good God to send a deliverer to little Syd. as he had sent a helper to her at the Bridge of the Tres Puentes. At intervals she heard with straining ears the faint far coo-ees as the searchers called to each other.

Out in the bush the black stockmen hunted persistently for little Syd.'s tracks. But they could not do effective work in the darkness.

Mr. Burke and Mr. Collins, with half a dozen of the neighbouring run-holders, who had responded instantly to the call, divided up a section of country between them and quartered it persistently. Several of them carried lanterns on their saddles. They shouted and coo-eed hour after hour, listening eagerly for the childish cry in reply that they longed so much to hear.

Harry Verner and Tom kept near the two black-trackers. They spoke very little. Their hearts were too full. Tom, like his father, resolutely put aside those chilling paralysing fears for his little playmate. He concentrated all his will power on the task of finding little Syd—before it was too late. He knew that there was no danger from the wild blacks until daylight. Their superstitious fears was a sufficient guarantee of that. Not a blackfellow in New South Wales would venture to leave his camp during the hours of darkness.

But the dingoes! Tom tried not to think of the dingoes. He roused his tired horse with his heel and pushed on beside his father. As he joined him a long melancholy howl came through the night. Tom shuddered in spite of himself.

With thud of hooves and crackling of branches, half a dozen of the wild scrub cattle that ranged at liberty over the hills until the mustering parties should come to round them up, charged past the searchers and disappeared through the dark colonnades of blackbutt and tallow-wood.

Sunrise at last!

The two black-trackers had brought Henry Verner and Tom clean through a ten-mile belt of timber of varying density during the night. Grassy open pastures were found in the timber belt here and there. The scrub cattle found them readily enough.

Verner, as he looked with haggard eyes towards the dawn, saw the open country in front of him—a vast immensity of plain and range. Yonder was Coombul Creek to the South-east. Turning northward, he could see the great mass of the Canoblas mountain miles and miles away. He could not help giving a groan.

“We have passed the poor little chap in the thick timber in the night, Tom,” he said huskily. “I must go back and cheer up your mother. Keep with Long Jimmy and Derribong. and I will be with you again soon.

Henry Verner touched his horse with the spur and rode off, heavy at heart, to encourage Juana with new hopes, though his own hopes were sinking, in spite of his determined efforts to ward off despair.

The coo-ees of the other searchers were growing faint and infrequent—depressing evidence of their discouragement. But Long Jimmy and Derribong applied themselves to their task with renewed vigor, now that the daylight had come. They quested forward silently with the pertinacity of bloodhounds on a trail.

Tom looked towards the ten-mile belt of timbered

country that he had traversed during the night, and as he looked something like despair began to creep into his heart. Somewhere in that vast track of pathless forest little Syd. was lying. Dense brushwood and heavy scrub of box and myall and young saplings, hundreds of thousands of blackbutts and bluegums, a single one of which would screen a child from the sight of the searchers—how could he hope to find little Syd. in all that mighty maze, even if the lad had survived the exposure and all the perils of the night?

But Tom summoned his will power to reinforce his hopes, and the indomitable resolution that was part of his very nature, and had been absorbed into his being during the long months when Juana had marched behind the army from Vittoria to Toulouse before he was born, reasserted itself. He put all doubts away from him and pressed forward steadily.

The silence of the bush was oppressive—broken only by the occasional screech of a lory or the soft tap tap of a wallaby hopping through the undergrowth.

The blacks had not yet picked up the trail, and were taking the shortest line back to the point where they had entered the thick timber on the previous evening. In the daylight they expected to find the lost child's foot-marks easily enough in the soft ground near his home.

After travelling for a couple of hours the blacks led Tom up a slope that rose stiffly to a green well-grassed plateau on the top. The frightened bellowing of a bullock fell upon the boy's ears, and he heard a warning shout from Derribong just in time to pull his horse off the treacherous surface of a shaking bog. He realised the danger at once. There were many such bogs on the higher points of the rolling downs or plains in the region round Bathurst.

The bullock had sunk to its brisket in the horrible morass. It had ceased to struggle. It continued to bellow with terror.

Tom would gladly have stayed and attempted to rescue the hapless animal, but he steeled his heart

against pity. Delay might be fatal to his chance of rescuing his brother. He left the wretched bullock to sink to its doom, and pressed on after the black boys.

A terrible thought flashed through his mind, that little Syd., stumbling forward through the darkness, had walked into one of these bottomless swamps that were covered with a deceptive surface of green herbage. The thought turned him sick with horror. He wiped his brow and found it clammy.

Resolutely he refused to think of that dread possibility. The blacks had described an arc of a circle during the night. They were returning along the tangent and were travelling fast, in order to have plenty of daylight when they had once picked up the trail in the clear ground outside the wide belt and thickly timbered country.

Tom was very tired. He had had neither food nor sleep. He could not touch the food that he carried in his wallet for Syd. Fortunately there was plenty of water in the creeks. He did not suffer from thirst. He kept his energy unflagging, and his determination unweakened.

The coo-ees of the other searchers had entirely ceased. They must have travelled many miles away. Tom began to wonder where his father was. He coo-eed as loudly as he could. There was no reply.

The bush became more and more open. The blacks showed Tom the tracks of the scrub cattle leading towards a large patch of lightly wooded country almost like a park.

Tom shaded his eyes with his hand. He could see the cattle bunched together half a mile away. Something in the way that they were standing made his heart beat faster. He watched them carefully. A black bull trotted forward with his nose to the ground, and then stopped abruptly. Several others did the same. They left off feeding and moved slowly forward. Something in their movements suggested inquiry.

"Mine bin tinkit bull gindie," remarked Derribong.

That was it. He could see the cattle "gindie." To "gindie" was to play around. The expressive word seemed to signify restlessness—and investigation.

A sudden hope flamed through Tom's brain. He put spurs to his horse and dashed forward to investigate the investigations. Why did the cattle "gindie"? His wild yearning suggested an answer that he hardly dared to accept lest it should be followed by disappointment. But the hope became belief, and the belief became assurance long before he reached the spreading bluegum round which the cattle were grouped, nosing the ground, and snorting inquisitively.

As Tom rode up they galloped off, tails in air. And there at the foot of the bluegum, a good eight miles from his home, lay little Syd., wearied out and fast asleep, still clutching in his small fingers the remains of a fern root that he had been chewing to assuage his hunger when he dropped off.

Little Syd. opened his eyes and smiled faintly, as Tom dropped on his knees beside him. "I knew you'd come, Tom," was all he said, and then holding Tom by the hand, he struggled to his feet.

But Tom made him sit down again and drink the milk and eat some of the bread and meat that he had brought so far, in spite of his own hunger. But Syd. would not eat unless Tom would eat too, and when Long Jimmy and Derribong rode up they found the lost child relating his adventures to his rescuer between generous bites of the food that Tom had rigorously refused to touch all through the long search.

Tom put Syd. on his own horse, and then climbed into the saddle behind him. The blacks led the way at a canter, shouting loud and joyous coo-ees as they rode—coo-ees that soon brought Henry Verner crashing through the light scrub on his big stock horse, to look with delight and pride on his two sons, the rescuer and the rescued.

Juana met them with tears of joy and thankfulness long before they reached the homestead, and in a very

short time Mr. Collins and Mr. Burke, and all the surrounding settlers who had taken part in the search, were gathered together at the homestead to offer their congratulations and to receive the heartfelt thanks of Juana and Verner for their arduous work. The men had all been in the saddle for nearly 18 hours. They were hungry, thirsty, and exhausted, but overflowing with happiness. Juana would have liked to kiss them all, but she contented herself with shaking each one of them warmly by the hand instead, and Mr. Con. Burke was so much overcome by his feelings that he could not resist taking Juana's hand and kissing it before them all.

It was a memorable evening at the hospitable homestead, and both little Syd. and Tom had to recount their respective adventures over and over again amid a chorus of exclamations of apprehension and admiration from the assembled party.

The moon was riding high above the vast dark timber belt that had been robbed of its prey, when Mr. Collins, Mr. Burke, and the friends whom they had collected to join in the search, mounted their horses and set off for their homes, leaving Juana and Verner alone together with their sons.

Juana put her hand in her husband's as they stood looking out over the open country, that stretched away in front of them, in a succession of low ridges towards the distant ranges. By night the scene reminded her of the country outside Vittoria.

"I prayed to the good God to send a helper to the little one, my Harry," said Juana softly, "And he sent our own son—just as he sent you to me long ago."

"Tom is a splendid fellow," said Henry Verner proudly. "He ought to be a soldier."

A wave of recollection flooded Juana's brain, making her think of Biddy Flynn and her emphatic prediction. The very words came back to Juana. She looked up into her husband's face and said whimsically, with a depth of feeling that contrasted curiously with the veritable accent of Biddy Flynn, "Arrah, how cud he help it, an him a follerin' the arr-my befure he was born."

CHAPTER VIII.

ENTER MOIRA BURKE.

Unusually heavy and continuous rainfalls marked the early thirties throughout New South Wales, and the iron gangs working on the road over the Blue Mountains suffered terribly, but they kept the road to Bathurst open, and the little city made steady progress. Bathurst even possessed the civilising and refining influence of the town stocks, and one of little Syd.'s earliest recollections was connected with those same stocks in which a drunken man was confined.

Verner had taken Tom and little Syd. into Bathurst when he went there to transact some business with the Bathurst Bank, an enterprising little institution which had been started by six of the leading men of the district, among whom Verner was included. While their father was in the bank, the two boys wandered along the main street to investigate, and speedily arrived at the town stocks in which the town drunkard was shut up as usual, with his feet sticking out through two holes in a stout board. Two or three urchins were jeering at the unfortunate prisoner, and just as Tom and Syd. came upon the scene one of the urchins picked up a handful of mud and threw it at the defenceless confinee.

The town drunkard was an old man with long white hair and a straggling white beard. The red mud struck him on the cheekbone, and spattered both hair and beard. While the urchin was still clapping his hands in delight at his successful shot, a particularly active and ferocious wild cat descended upon him, apparently from the clouds, and proceeded to assault him furiously.

It was little Syd., who had been seized by a sudden

access of rage at this assault upon an old man who could not protect himself. Syd. flew at little Jack Hall, the assailant of defenceless old age, and planted a solid smack on the nose of that young gentleman that warned Jack Hall to do his best. Tom "kept a ring" as the small fry showed a disposition to pour in and overwhelm the valiant Syd. by force of numbers. Round one ended with Jack Hall very much the worse for wear, and bleeding from the nose, while Syd. glared at him, shouting, "Come on when you're ready."

The town drunkard made a pathetic noise, which Tom interpreted as a feeble attempt to cheer his young champion. The old man clapped his hands. "Well done, my young cockerel," he wheezed. "Give 'im another one on the conk for me."

Round two opened at a pace that was plainly too hot to last. Little Syd. went for his urchin with a succession of punches aimed at the freckled little snub nose that stood out on the small round face like a raisin on a plum-pudding. Jack Hall subsided into the gutter at the side of the road, holding his nose with his grimy little thumb and forefinger as though to assure himself that it was still in its place, and howling loudly at his own discomfiture.

When Verner arrived on the scene he found Syd. presenting the slices of bread and butter with which Juana had carefully provided him for his luncheon, to the town drunkard, who was eating the food ravenously. It was the town drunkard who narrated little Syd.'s prowess—in language that would have been extravagant if applied to Sayers or Heenan.

And Tom, too, added his meed of praise. "My word, father," he whispered privately, "Syd. has plenty of pluck. That other boy is at least two years older, and quite a stone heavier." Tom said no word about his own part in keeping the ring, and holding off the rabble of boys. He never spoke of himself. That was due to the inborn soldierly instinct.

As the two boys grew towards manhood the affection

between them was undiminished, though the differences in their characters were accentuated. Tom was still the protector, loyal, steadfast, reticent, inspiring confidence in men and women alike—the confidence which carried an assurance that he would be faithful unto death. He was devoted to his handsome, dashing, brilliant young brother, who did almost everything better than Tom did himself—even to making love, at which Syd. was an adept.

Now it happened that their sister Aileen, who had always been a quiet little thing in her childhood—the darling of her father and mother and her two brothers—bloomed out in her teens into a singularly lovely girl, who resembled to an extraordinary degree the Juana of past years. To Henry Verner the likeness was remarkable, and he often spoke about it to Juana. Remembering Juana's irresistible charm, he used to look with misgivings at his daughter, wondering how long he would be permitted to keep her, and speculating upon the suitor who would one day arrive. When a girl is as pretty as Aileen, suitors have a way of dropping from the clouds. Henry Verner's experience of life had taught him that much.

And indeed her father was not the only person who had noticed Aileen's ripening beauty and the allurements of her large, dark, long-lashed eyes. These attractions had been vividly impressed upon the plastic imagination of the Verners' nearest neighbor, Mr. Con. Burke, whose romantic regard in old days for Juana was gradually transferred to Aileen. To Juana, young Con. Burke had never been more than an impulsive and romantic boy. She felt a genuine pleasure when she found him riding over in the evenings to talk to Aileen, who, in truth, was completely captivated by the handsome young fellow. And so it came about that at least two or three times a week Con. Burke's horse was to be seen at the slip-rail soon after sunset, where he had to wait patiently, swishing off the flies with his tail, while Con

and Aileen discussed matters of serious import on a log amid the bushes.

It was only natural that Aileen should like Con. Burke, seeing that his sister, Moira, was her closest girl friend. And as Con. Burke's visits to Coonara became as regularly recurrent as the tides, it was inevitable that Moira Burke should find her way to the Verner homestead more frequently than before.

At each successive visit the fact was borne in upon Tom Verner with increasing force that Moira Burke was an extraordinarily attractive girl. Her freshness and charm positively bewitched him. Her dark hair and dark-blue Irish eyes held him captive. When she smiled at him her little white teeth were the prettiest things in the world.

It was singularly unfortunate that Syd. should have formed almost precisely the same opinions about Moira as Tom. Every time she rode over in the morning to see Aileen it occurred to Syd. that she looked fresher and more flower-like than before. Syd. did not believe in keeping knowledge of that kind to himself. He would not lock it up in his own breast as Tom did. He imparted the information to Moira with a flashing glance from his own dark eyes, and Moira, listening, found his voice full of music.

Among Tom Verner's many sterling and serviceable qualities the gift of keen observation was not included. Moreover, though he could be silent he could not act a part, and hence it never occurred to him that any other person, least of all his dearly-loved brother Syd., would deliberately conceal his feelings and behave with a light-hearted and unconcerned demeanor that gave no clue to his emotions on a question of such vital importance as that of Moira Burke.

It was true that Moira never gave Tom any real encouragement. But, as he reflected, girls were not expected to know their own minds all at once. He had made known to her unmistakably his feelings towards her, and her cheeks had flushed suddenly rose-red, while

tears gathered in the corners of her dark-blue Irish eyes. She had stretched out both her hands to him, and had said: "No, Tom, indeed I am not good enough for you." And then she had run out of the room. Tom was a bit puzzled, but he resolved to be patient and trust to time. Poor Tom!

He said nothing to Syd. about his love for Moira. It would not interest Syd., he thought. Besides, there were some things that were too sacred to be talked about, even between brothers. That was how Tom felt about Moira.

But to Juana's heart there came a sharp pang of grief for the lost happiness of her first born son. She had seen the situation with unerring clearness. Syd.'s dashing manliness and fascinating grace had captivated Moira. It was nobody's fault. It was just the working of fate—the fate that operates and achieves its object, by the mysterious forces of character and temperament. Juana had always known in her inmost heart that if Tom and Syd. ever loved the same girl, Syd. with his irresistible grace and gaiety would win the day against the sterling steadfastness and honest loyalty of his brother.

Juana looked wistfully at her two sons as they rode off together, with Moira, while Con. Burke and Aileen rode side by side behind them, to the mustering of the cattle. It seemed to her then that big-hearted Tom was the only one of the party who did not know that all his hopes were dust.

Henry Verner brushed aside all Juana's uneasy apprehensions when she whispered them to him. Of course the boys would fall in love. Boys always did. But they got over it. "Do not worry yourself about them, dear one," he said. "They will marry when fate fixes the day and the girl, as their father did before them. Perhaps they will fall in love many times before then."

"Ah! And did you fall in love many times before you married me, my Harry?" asked Juana, half in play, and half in earnest.

Verner kissed her tenderly and, like a wise man, "smiling, put the question by."

But Juana's fears for her firstborn were not relieved. She could see that when Moira rode over to Coonara with her brother, Con., it was Syd., and not Tom, who brought the new light into her eyes, and the flush of color to her cheeks. Tom himself could not, or would not, see it. Syd. to him was still the "little Syd." of his boyhood—to be loved always and guarded against all danger.

Riding over to Pretty Plains with Con. Burke and Aileen and Moira one afternoon, the two brothers learnt a disquieting piece of news from Burke's shepherd, a sinister beetle-browed old man, who had been a poacher in the old country in his youth, and had been mixed up in an affray in which a gamekeeper was brutally murdered. Old Ben, the shepherd, was a man of few words as a rule. But he was quite talkative on this occasion.

"Them wild blacks is givin' us a lot of trouble, Mr. Burke," he began, as he showed the party into his bark hut, and proceeded to brew a billy of tea. "I reckon I'll teach 'em a lesson pretty soon."

"What have they been up to now, Ben?" asked Burke.

"Sheep-spearin' again," remarked the ex-poacher grimly. "They got away with three fat yowes larst night. Mortial fond of mutton them wild blacks are." Circumstances alter cases, and the ex-poacher, having become a keeper, was very bitter against the poaching blacks.

"But I thought that you were very friendly with all the blacks around here, Ben?" said Moira. "You told me that you often gave them damper and mutton when they came to the hut."

"So I did, Miss, so I did. But them villains aint got no gratitude. That there Bremebe, the king of the tribe, stole my tommyhawk directly my back was turned, an' went off with it an' 'arf a bag o' flour as well. Many a time they come around and steal my dinner outer the

pot when I'm out on the run. They want a lesson badly for sure." Old Ben looked reflectively at his double-barrelled gun standing in the corner.

"Now look here, Ben," said Burke, "I'm not going to have you shooting Bremebeba or any of his men, just remember that. We don't want to be attacked by the whole tribe and waddied when we're asleep. If they do spear a sheep or two, let 'em alone. It'll be less trouble in the end."

CHAPTER IX.

THE POISONED DAMPER.

Old Ben muttered to himself as he showed his visitors out of the hut and watched them mount their horses. When they had ridden away he returned to the hut, took some flour out of a sack, and proceeded to make a damper.

He usually made a damper with flour and water and salt. On this occasion he added another ingredient—several spoonsful of a white powder which he took from a small paper parcel that he carefully replaced in his cupboard. He made enough dough in this way for three large dampers, which he then baked in the embers of the wood fire. The dampers when withdrawn from the ashes were of a rich golden brown color. They looked deliciously appetising.

Old Ben's Kelpie sheep-dog, Bluey, his pride and joy, the best drafter of sheep in the whole district, sniffed at the dampers and looked at Ben inquiringly. "Get out of the hut, d—— you," snarled old Ben, in sudden rage and alarm. The obedient dog slunk out of the hut in perplexity. There was something that he did not understand about this.

Having laid the three large golden-brown dampers on the rude table in the hut, old Ben walked out and closed the door behind him. It was close upon sunset. Whistling to Bluey, he walked off in the direction of the Pretty Plains homestead, while the dog followed at his heels.

He was hardly out of sight of the hut when half a dozen blacks, who had watched his departure from a clump of timber on the hillside, emerged from cover and

ran down to the shepherd's lonely dwelling. Bremeba led the way. With him went his relatives, Eereenina, Peshoo, Wonga Wonga, Korere, and Berrilong.

The blacks carried no weapons. They were fine, tall, muscular savages, full of bounding vitality. Moreover, they were hungry. All except Bremeba, who had just finished a satisfying meal of stolen mutton. Bremeba peered through the window of the empty hut. He saw old Ben's double-barrelled gun in the corner, and his eyes glistened. He saw the three golden brown dampers lying on the table. In other circumstances the dampers would have interested him supremely. But as his stomach was full of lightly broiled mutton, the dampers made no appeal to him. His half-brother, his uncle, his nephew, his cousin, and his mother-in-law's sister's son, who had accompanied him, might have the dampers for all he cared—as long as he could get that gun.

He had always longed for a gun.

Bremeba opened the door of the hut and went in, followed by his relatives, who at once observed the dampers, prepared so thoughtfully by old Ben, and fell upon the delicious food of the white man with loud grunts of approval. In a very few minutes nothing was left of the dampers but a few crumbs on the floor. The leader snatched up the double-barrelled gun, of which he knew the use perfectly well, and also the powder flask and bag full of lead slugs that stood by it. He ran out of the hut, followed by his half-brother, his uncle, his nephew, his cousin, and his mother-in-law's sister's son. They moved at a more leisurely pace because they were full of undigested damper.

When they reached the cover of the thick bush they earnestly desired to stop and lie down, but Bremeba would not hear of it. In his savage mind there was, if not a consciousness of guilt, at any rate a conviction that when old Ben discovered the loss of his gun he would take up the pursuit of the raiders. Bremeba determined to put as great a distance as possible between himself and old Ben.

But before the blacks had travelled more than a mile through the bush towards the distant camp of their tribe, Bremeba's relatives felt disagreeable and terrifying sensations quite outside the range of their experience. They were attacked by horrible pains. They lay down on the ground to rest, but their limbs twitched and shook. They were seized by violent convulsions, and burned by dreadful thirst. Their backs were arched backward like a bow—a frightful spectacle for Bremeba to see. Gradually their struggles ceased. They turned frightened, dying eyes full of dumb appeal upon Bremeba. Why had he not protected them against the evil magic of the white man's dampers? Bremeba realised the cause of their agony at once. He had not eaten the damper, and therefore he had escaped. Trembling with fear he watched his relatives die, and then he hurried away to the camp of the tribe to lay the matter before the old men.

As a result of the instructions received from the old men of the tribe, Bremeba, carrying his spear and waddy as well as his double-barrelled gun, led a party of thirty armed blacks, through the bush at daybreak, making for old Ben's hut. As they crept up to the hut, Bluey the sheep dog, barking furiously, rushed out and pinned Bremeba by the leg. The dog's sharp teeth sank into the black's flesh, piercing to the bone. Next instant a heavy blow from a waddy descended on the dog's skull, smashing it like an egg-shell. Bluey never barked again.

Awakened by the first bark of the sheep dog, old Ben realised in a flash that the blacks were on him, and rushed for his gun. It was not in the corner of the hut. He had not missed it on the previous evening when he noted with grim satisfaction that the poisoned dampers had been taken during his absence, but now the bitter truth burst upon him with crushing force. The blacks had taken the gun, and the powder and shot too, as well as the dampers.

Looking round frantically for a weapon, old Ben

found only a stout sapling that he had used to poke his fire with. He snatched it up just as the blacks burst into the hut in a confused mass, and laid about him furiously. But the blacks had brought their long narrow shields, and they easily warded off the desperate shepherd's blows. Deprived of the white man's weapons, old Ben was no match for the infuriated blacks. He was felled to the ground by a blow from a waddy, and then Bremebe snatched a spear from one of his followers and thrust it clean through the shepherd's body, pinning him to the floor. Old Ben gave a great groan, a shudder passed through him, and he was dead.

As the early morning sun poured in through the little window of the hut it lit up the group of excited ochre-painted savages standing round the body of the ex-poacher. The embers of the fire in which the dampers, poisoned with strychnine, had been baked by the man now dead, were cold and grey. The remains of his last solitary meal were still on the rude table. His dog, faithful to the end, lay dead outside the door.

The blacks jabbering together, pointed to the body. A gruesome rite was still to be performed—the rite of “buckeening.” One of the blacks bent down and turned the body over—face downwards on the floor. He thrust a short spear into the back just over the region of the kidneys, and worked the spear round and round to enlarge the wound. Thrusting his hand into the hole, he withdrew the kidneys and the kidney fat, still warm and gory—the kidney-fat which was believed to confer strength and courage upon him who tore it from the quivering body of his enemy.

In this way, slain by men of the Stone Age, with all the circumstances of primitive barbarism, perished the old ex-poacher, seeing again with dying eyes the leafy lanes of Warwickshire, the thickets where Shakespeare once killed a deer, and where he himself as a boy had roamed “in the season of the year” until one day

with a trapped hare in his pocket he was arrested and sent beyond the seas—never to return.

All through the long sultry forenoon the body of old Ben, mutilated in ghastly fashion by the buckeening blacks, lay uncared for on the floor of the lonely hut. The thin door swung to and fro on the rough hinges of Kangaroo-skin. The body of the dead dog lay out in the sun, a few yards from the door.

Silence and desolation enveloped the tragedy.

Moira Burke sang to herself as she moved about the kitchen at Pretty Plains. She was alone in the homestead. For her brother Con had gone off with the three men immediately after breakfast to look at a mob of sheep that he had bought on the previous day. Moira was singing out of sheer gladness of heart. She felt very happy that morning. Her thoughts were very pleasant company. They were all of Syd Verner.

She went out on the wide varandah at the back of the homestead. "Bill-ee! Bill-ee!" she called in her clear, young, joyous voice.

The boy who looked after the horses and did the odd jobs at the homestead came sauntering in from the paddock, swinging a bridle in his hand.

"Billy," said Moira, "I want you to go and catch the young mare and ride over to old Ben's hut with his rations. I promised to let him have some tea, and sugar and tobacco this morning. Hurry up, now, and don't be long. I've plenty for you to do when you get back."

So Billy set off on the young mare for the old shepherd's hut, and Moira went back to her kitchen still singing.

Billy whistled as he rode, and the beat of the young mare's unshod hoofs as she swept along in a springy and inspiring canter kept time with his tune. It was a cloudless morning. A light breeze blew right in Billy's face. The young mare sniffed it appreciatively.

As they drew near to the hut, the mare pricked her ears, and sniffed the breeze again—this time with vague

alarm. There was something in the wind that frightened her. She stopped so suddenly that she almost shot Billy over her head. Then she began to back away from the hut.

"What's the matter with ye?" said Billy, angrily. He rammed in the spurs, and forced the reluctant animal forward. She sniffed the air again and snorted, sweating and trembling. Twenty yards from the hut she came to a standstill.

Billy slipped from the saddle and threw his bridle over the gate post. He started when he saw the dead body of the sheep dog near the door. "Good Lord!" said Billy, "someone has killed poor Bluey. I wonder who done it."

The boy went on, carrying his sugar bag full of groceries. "Don't suppose old Ben is in the hut," he muttered to himself. "I'll just leave the stuff on the table an' get back."

He took two steps into the hut and then let out a scream of fright, dropping the tea and sugar and tobacco on the floor, beside that appalling thing round which the flies were thickly clustering.

One glance was enough to assure Billy that old Ben would never need rations again. The terrified boy saw the frightful wound that had crushed the old man's skull, and also the gaping hole above the loins. "The buckeeners done it," he muttered to himself, with a shudder, looking round the hut with the fear of death in his eyes. Who could tell whether the blacks might not still be lurking near.

CHAPTER X.

THE ATTACK ON PRETTY PLAINS.

Leaving the tea and sugar and tobacco strewed on the floor beside the mutilated corpse of the shepherd, the boy Billy rushed from the hut and snatched the bridle of the mare from the gate post, and set off at a wild gallop for the Verners' homestead, which was two miles nearer than Burke's place to the murdered man's hut.

Ashen pale and shivering with fear, Billy made report to Juana that the buckeeners were out. They had done for old Ben already. They might put in an appearance at Coonara, or at the Pretty Plains homestead at any moment.

Juana took up the double-barrelled gun that stood in the corner, and, going outside upon the verandah, fired both barrels in rapid succession. It was the signal that had been agreed upon.

In that still air the sound carried far. Henry Verner heard it away by the creek, and so did Tom and Syd, and the three "Government men" who were with him.

"My God—the blacks!" cried Verner, and rushed for his horse. Tom and Syd did the same, and all started for the homestead. Unspoken fears looked out of their eyes.

But the sight of Juana in her white dress on the verandah reassured them. She was still safe, and surely that was Billy, the boy from Pretty Plains standing beside her.

Billy's startling story was soon told, and Verner and his sons held a brief council of war.

"I must stay here with the three men. They are running back as fast as they can from the creek," said Verner. "We are well armed. The four of us with guns can hold the house against the whole tribe if they come. Your mother will be quite safe here. But you two lads must ride to Pretty Plains at once with Billy. He says that Moira is all alone in the house. That's enough. Take your guns, and ride hard."

There was no need to tell Tom and Syd to ride hard. Billy on the young mare was in the lead for the first mile. The young mare had all the best of the weight, for Billy the boy was a featherweight, and Tom's black horse and Syd's grey were each carrying over 11 stone. But the young mare had already that morning gone the distance from the shepherd's hut to the Verners' homestead at racing pace. She could not keep with the black and the grey—both fresh horses. Steadily she began to drop back, though Billy used his spurs ruthlessly.

"Mr. Tom—Mr. Syd, don't leave me," yelled Billy the boy, half crazed with terror. "I'm afeared—of the buckeeners."

"Come on then. Shake up the mare. We can't wait," called Syd in reply.

Tom, a soldier to the core, said nothing. Since Moira's life was at stake, Billy would have to take his chance. Tom weighed the issue in his mind, and came to a resolute decision. In order to save Moira from the blacks he would abandon Billy to his fate, if necessary, with as little compunction as he had shown in abandoning the bullock in the morass when he was searching the forest for little Syd so long ago.

The black horse was galloping like a racer. He was nearly thoroughbred. In his heart Tom blessed the wise forethought of his godfather Sir Thomas Brisbane in the past. Brisbane made some ghastly mistakes in his administration, but at least he did one good thing. He had a hobby for horseflesh, and at his own expense he imported a number of high-class Arab sires, from

Mocha and Calcutta to Sydney. Hence he has been called the father of Australian horse breeding. There was Arab blood in Tom's black horse. Tom knew that he would gallop till he dropped.

Looking over his shoulder, Tom saw Syd's grey—a nearly pure Arab, smaller than the black, but perfectly moulded—sailing along at his girths with the untiring gallop inherited from a desert-bred sire. They had still six miles to go.

Behind them toiled Billy's crossbred young mare. She had nearly shot her bolt, when they reached that long, deep watercourse that ran down to the creek, which was one of the numerous tributaries that found their way into the Macquarie.

Billy looked with horror at the watercourse. It was too wide to jump. The sides were so steep, that though a horse might slide down to the bottom without falling, it seemed almost impossible for any animal except a cat to climb up the opposite bank. Yet it was absolutely necessary for Billy to get across the watercourse somehow. He would have to ride several miles along the bank before an easy place could be reached.

"Come along Billy," yelled Syd, turning his head to see where the mare was. She was nearly a hundred yards behind them.

As the leaders reached the watercourse Tom urged the black with heel and voice to the very brink. The black did not like the look of it. He snorted and hung back, but his inflexible rider held him to the desperate task. Leaning right back in the saddle Tom called to his horse, and the black carefully advanced his forefeet over the side of the bank. Then, putting his feet together he slid down on his haunches a good six yards to the bed of the watercourse, in which a shallow rivulet was running. Slipping from the saddle Tom put the bridle over his arm and began to scramble up the opposite bank. It was terribly steep. It looked almost like the side of a house. Over and over again it seemed

as though both man and horse must fall back into that deep cleft in the earth's surface.

Billy the boy watched them with fascinated gaze. At last, with one more bound, the black horse stood on the top, trembling while Tom patted his neck.

"Hurry up, Syd," cried Tom in a hoarse voice; "we've no time to waste." He put his foot into the stirrup and swung himself into the saddle. The black horse broke into a gallop at once.

But Syd was wasting valuable moments in endeavouring to persuade Billy to face the inevitable. At last he got the mare up to the brink, with Billy still in the saddle.

"Sit well back, Billy," shouted Syd, shaking out the long, heavy thong of the stockwhip that he carried in front of him. He and Tom had both brought their stockwhips. There was no escape for the mare. The stockwhip whistled behind her, and fell on her quivering flanks. She could neither turn nor go back. She had to go forward, and she went. Sliding down the precipitous bank of the watercourse in a cloud of red dust, she fell over on her side just before reaching the bottom, and Billy slipped off just in time to escape being crushed to death.

Syd looked out and saw the black horse already well away in the front. He bitterly repented his folly in wasting time over Billy. Bringing the grey Arab to the edge of the bank, he imitated Tom's tactics, and quickly reached the opposite side. Leaving Billy and the mare still floundering in the bed of the watercourse, he set sail in pursuit of Tom on the black.

The grey Arab had a wonderful turn of speed. He began steadily to overhaul the black. Syd thought of Moira—alone in the homestead at Pretty Plains. Then he thought of the buckeeners, fresh from a killing. He called to the grey Arab, and the grey Arab flew along in the wake of the black.

"Oh, the French will come again, says the Shan Van

Vogh," sang Moira in her joyous, fresh, young voice, as, with sleeves tucked up above the elbow, she kneaded a great mass of white dough on the table of the kitchen at Pretty Plains homestead. She was very lovely and very happy, and the sound of her voice floated out through the open window as she sang the old ballad that her father had sung her to sleep with many a time when she was a little child. At regular intervals, fitting in with the beat of the melody, she paused to press the yielding dough upon the table, and to anyone listening the sound would have sounded like this:—

"The French—(knead) will come again—(knead),
 Says the Shan Van Vogh (knead);
 And they'll bring—(knead) ten thousand men—
 (knead),

Says the Shan Van Vogh (knead),
 With musket and with ball"—

Bang! Bang! went two shots that sounded like a double-barrelled gun down in the scrub, a quarter of a mile away, almost at the same moment there came a scream of pain. Moira stopped singing. She was puzzled to account for the firing, and also for the scream.

Down in the scrub Bremeba was carrying old Ben's gun by the barrels. It was loaded with parrot shot, and had the percussion cap on the nipples. Bremeba, who had been on friendly terms with old Ben before the damper-poisoning episode had often seen the shepherd load and fire the gun, bringing down parrots from unheard of distances. Bremeba had observed that old Ben rammed gun powder and leaden shot down the barrels and placed the little copper caps on the nipples before putting the gun to his shoulder and causing it to roar fire and death by pulling the trigger. But it did not occur to Bremeba that the gun could roar destruction by itself. Crawling through the scrub immediately in front of him on hands and knees, went that noted warrior Koringa, carrying his shield and redgum

waddy slung over his left shoulder, the boomerang stuck through his belt of plaited grass and a bundle of long spears, with barbed points in his right hand.

As Bremeba with the barrels of old Ben's gun pointing straight in front of him was crawling through the bush immediately behind that naked buck Koringa, a tendril of supplejack caught in the triggers of the gun. Both hammers fell, and as the two explosions rang out almost simultaneously a handful of parrot shot struck Koringa in a non-vital part of his person. It was Koringa's yell of pain and terror that had startled Moira and caused her to break off in the middle of her song.

Koringa, bleeding freely from a severe flesh wound, took no further part in the expedition. He crawled away to the creek and lay down on a bed of ferns to recover.

The chief concern of Bremeba now, was to re-load the white man's thunder-stick. He had watched old Ben perform the operation often enough, but for the life of him he could not recollect the proper order of the proceedings that made up the complicated rite. He had the powder flask, the percussion caps, and the bag of shot in his hands, but what to do with them he could not remember. At last, after long and earnest cogitation, he rammed a handful of shot down each barrel as a preliminary, and then a small piece of bark instead of the wads that he had seen old Ben using. Finally he poured a liberal charge of powder on top of the shot and completed the operation by ramming down another piece of bark and driving it well home with the ram-rod, as he had seen old Ben do. Placing percussion caps on the nipples, he cocked the hammers, and, holding the gun gingerly aloft at arm's length, he signed to the bucks to resume the advance.

After the recent rains the native grass in the paddocks round the Pretty Plains homestead was nearly three feet high. Thirty bucks crept unseen through the tall grass, each carrying club and shield, and dragging after

him a long, slender spear, gripped between his toes. The sinuous line of bucks was like a long black snake. It glided nearer and nearer to the homestead. Bremeba was the head of the snake. After the unfortunate accident to Koringa, not a single one of the bucks would consent to crawl in front of the white man's thunderstick—a malevolent thing that required to be humoured, or else it would destroy blackfellows of its own accord.

The long, black snake crept up close to the homestead. Bremeba was not sure whether any of the white men would be at home or not. He resolved to send out Naringa to reconnoitre. Naringa departed on his mission—a black shadow in the grass.

CHAPTER XI.

“BAKKOOI NAN-NOMBA NINDA.”

“The French will come again,
Says the Shan Van Vogh,
They’ll bring ten thousand——”

Ha! What was that? Moira’s joyous singing broke off abruptly again as a hideous black face glared at her round the corner of the open window and a guttural voice remarked, truculently, “Gibbit bacca.”

In an instant Moira slammed down the window and closed and bolted the heavy shutters. She stepped to the door that opened from the kitchen to the back verandah and locked it. She bolted it top and bottom. Then she locked and bolted the other door leading from the front hall of the bungalow-cottage into the kitchen. She barricaded the back door by dragging the kitchen table up against it, and the door leading into the hall by pushing the heavy kitchen dresser across it. Her brother’s gun stood against the wall loaded in both barrels with slugs for kangaroo. In the drawer of the dresser was a heavy meat chopper. Moira was pale, but there was fighting blood in her veins. She went to the drawer of the dresser, took out the meat chopper, and laid it on the table. Surely she could keep off the solitary prowling black until Con or Billy, or both of them, arrived.

Listening intently, with every nerve strung to its highest pitch, she heard the soft pad-pad of the black-fellow’s naked feet as he ran round the verandah, peering through the windows, to see if there were any white men in the house. Very soon Naringa realised

with exultation that the “white Mary” was alone in the house.

“Bakkooi nan-nomba ninda. Bakkooi nan-nomba ninda—(“You are my prey. You are my prey”), muttered Naringa, as he tried to peer through the closed shutters at the white woman alone in the house.

Moira heard the black muttering and padding round the house. She trembled at the peril that she scarcely dared to think of. There were things that were worse than death. She glanced at the kitchen fire. The logs were burning brightly, and the water in the big saucepan was boiling and bubbling. She ladled about half of it with a dipper into an iron bucket.

Crash! Naringa brought down his “conterra,” or heavy-knobbed waddy, on the window pane and the reinforcing shutter inside. His brain was on fire. He did not intend to call up Bremeba and the bucks just yet. “Bakkooi nan-nomba ninda. Bakkooi nan-nomba ninda.”

There was another crash, as the conterra descended again, and the splintered shutter fell inwards, letting in the sunlight. Framed in the shattered woodwork, Moira saw the hideous face of the black, with low receding forehead, broad flattened nose, and wide cruel mouth. There was something in Naringa’s expression that made him look more hideous than before—an appalling glare of ferocity and savage passion.

“Bakkooi nan-nomba ninda.” He shouted it at her victoriously now. The window was smashed, and the shutters were in pieces. Naringa, leaving his waddy behind him on the verandah, threw himself into the opening and began to climb into the room. As he placed one hand on the window ledge Moira struck. The heavy meat chopper fell on the black’s forearm, shearing down through the muscles and cleaving half way through the bone. The chopper stuck in the bone. Moira could not withdraw it, though she tugged frantically, while the black’s yell of rage and pain rang

in her ears. As Naringa fell back on the verandah, the chopper went with him.

Pulling out the chopper with his left hand, the infuriated black hurled himself at the window a second time. He would kill the white Mary for that blow. He would kill her, but first——

The distorted black face, with gleaming white eyeballs and strong teeth, bared like the teeth of a wild animal, came through the window. Naringa was half way into the room. In another second he would have his unwounded hand on the white Mary.

Ah! that stopped him. Moira hurled the bucket of boiling water in his face, blinding him and scalding him. His eyeballs were scarred by the awful heat. Naringa fell back in agony on the verandah, groping blindly with his hands. He would never see the sunlight again. Moira realised that from him, at any rate, she was safe.

She stood there with the empty iron bucket still in her hand, shaking like a leaf. Her dark hair had fallen down, covering her white face, but her eyes looked out, shining and triumphant. She had conquered an unimaginable fate.

But even as she looked through the window, the light of triumph died out of her eyes, and they were filled with grey despair. Breneba and the bucks had heard Naringa's yell. They were rushing upon the house. She saw them—armed, naked, and terrible.

Whish! A spear flew through the window and buried itself quivering in the wall behind the girl. Moira dropped on her knees and prayed. Well death would be swift, at any rate. She closed her eyes.

Was that the drumming of blood in her eyes? Or was it the thunder of the hoofs of galloping horses?

She heard shouts of alarm and warning from the blacks, who were calling to each other. They had almost reached the house. The drumming sound came louder and nearer. Moira could hear it plainly now. It was the sound of horses going at racing pace.

The window was darkened once more. A blackfellow, club in hand, was already on the verandah. As he put his leg over the window ledge a gun spoke quite close at hand, and the window was clear again. Beside Naringa, who was still groping and muttering in blindness and agony, lay another of Bremebe's bucks—dead, with the side of his head blown off by a charge of slugs.

“Moira! Moira! You're safe now,” said a voice that thrilled the girl to the soul. It was the voice of Syd Vernèr.

“Thank God we were in time!” cried Tom, “but stay where you are, Moira. Don't come out yet.”

She looked through the window, and saw the two brothers sitting on their steaming horses, gun in hand. A heavy stockwhip hung on the saddle in front of each of them. Fifty yards away, the bucks stood irresolute, hesitating whether to fight or fly. Bremebe stood in front of them, carrying the white man's thunder-stick across his arm.

He spoke passionate words to his followers. He pointed to the white men, and held up two fingers to indicate the insignificance of the enemy. He pointed to the gun that he carried on his arm. The bucks brandished their waddies and stamped their feet. They shouted yells of defiance.

Still Tom and Syd sat there on their horses. Moira could not take her eyes from them.

For Bremebe the longed-for moment of his life had at last arrived. He would slay the white man with the white man's own weapon, and be famous forever in the tribe. He raised old Ben's gun to his shoulder, and exactly at that moment, the two brothers dropped their guns and charged.

Bremebe pulled both triggers of old Ben's gun. The percussion caps exploded—but nothing else, the gun having been loaded with the shot first, instead of the powder. The black hurled the gun to the ground in disgust. The white man's gun was evidently inhabited

by an evil devil. It would wound a blackfellow of its own accord, but it refused to destroy a white man, even when it was treated with the utmost respect. Bremeba's faith in the weapon, of which he had fondly hoped so much, was shattered for ever. He seized his "conterra," the nubby war club that had never played him false, and, with heart aflame, awaited the onset of the white men.

Behind him stamped the buckeeners, armed with spear and club and shield. Their savage war-cry was flung out on the wind. They chanted the death of their enemies, whose kidney-fat they would tear from the quivering bodies and leave the remains to be eaten by the black eaglehawks.

In the midst of their chant the whirlwind struck them.

Riding wide apart, Tom and Syd galloped straight at the vaunting blacks. Each of the riders grasped a heavy stockwhip, with a twenty feet thong of plaited rawhide, in his right hand. The bridles lay on the horses' necks, the riders guiding them with knee and heel.

Tom and Syd preferred to rely altogether on the stockwhips. They were adepts in the use of those terrible weapons, which would cut strips from the hide and flesh of the toughest bullock, if the wielders wished to be severe. As they galloped straight at the buckeeners, the long, murderous thongs flashed through the air, cracking like machine guns. At each crack a strip of black hide flew from the body of a shrieking savage, who a few moments earlier had been gloating over the prospect of the death and mutilation of the white man.

The mode of attack which was adopted by Tom and Syd completely demoralised the buckeeners. Against those terrible lightning strokes all defence was vain. The two young men wielded their weapons with a dexterity that was almost demoniacal. Swinging the heavy stockwhip with his right hand, the rider would cut hide and flesh from one would-be murderer, and then, carrying on the swing, would pass the stock like a

flash to his left hand, and come back with a reverse stroke that hit the body of the next man with the force and shock of an explosive bullet. Tom attacking on the right, and Syd on the left, had the blacks between two fires. They proceeded quite literally to cut them to pieces. The thought of Moira at the mercy of the buckeeners added fury to every stroke.

The blacks were full of wild courage. They would stand foot to foot against a foe and submit to be battered to death with the “conterra,” rather than yield an inch. But the stockwhip was a new and unheard of terror. Those agonising strokes that made the blood spurt in fountains and laid bare the quivering nerves, paralysed their will power. Flinging down shield and spear and waddy, they made a mad bolt for the bush, realising that once they reached the thick timber they would be safe.

Moira was out on the verandah now, watching the extraordinary scene. Tom and Syd dealt with the buckeeners exactly as they were accustomed to deal with a mob of wild scrub cattle. Galloping round the mob, they headed them back from the timber with terrible volleys from the rawhide thongs, that never fell without searing a black body and leaving a long red gash on it. Individual blacks would break away in frantic attempts to gain the shelter of the timber, but either Tom or Syd, with a stockwhip instead of a flaming sword, was always ready to hurl them back. And then the riders would charge at full gallop, and flog the fugitives back into the mob, knocking the blacks over like ninepins and distributing a crackling fire of stockwhip strokes as they passed. Wheeling their horses round, they would charge back again, repeating the operation until at last very few of the buckeeners were left standing.

When almost tired out with inflicting this tremendous punishment, the two brothers rounded up the harried and bleeding remainder of the savages, who had set out to massacre the inhabitants of Pretty Plains. Tom

and Syd drove the remnant in front of them with many a scarring stroke and flogged them with a last furious volley into the cover of the timber. Half a dozen blacks, including Bremeba, had been killed outright, having been galloped on by the horses as well as slashed by the stockwhips. The remainder crept away into the shelter of the timber and sought their camp in the far recesses of the bush, where the women waited to dress their wounds.

It was a terrific punishment—but think of Moira's fate, if Tom and Syd had not reached the homestead in time! Also, it was an effective punishment, for never was a wild black seen on Pretty Plains Station again.

As the two young men, with blood on their stockwhips, and their horses dripping with foam, rode up to the homestead and slid from their saddles to the ground, the white-faced girl tottered out upon the verandah, descended the three steps that led to the ground, and came towards the brothers, swaying from side to side as though every moment she would fall.

Tom and Syd both ran to meet her as she came on with outstretched arms. Tom was a few paces in advance. Moira did not seem to see him. With her white face showing through her dark, dishevelled hair, she stumbled past Tom and made straight for Syd.

Never a word she said, but, walking up to Syd, threw her arms about his neck, and burst into tears. Her spirit had sustained her during the crisis. Now that the imminent deadly danger was past, overwrought nature protested against the strain. The girl broke down utterly and sobbed without restraint upon Syd's shoulder.

"Oh my love! my love!" she murmured. "Thank God, you were just in time to save me."

The words were uttered in a voice that was scarcely more than a whisper, but Tom heard them, and a blinding revelation flashed upon his brain.

Moira loved his brother Syd—little Syd, whom he

had cherished and protected from babyhood! It was a staggering blow. But Tom had the blood of a soldier in his veins. He could face the inevitable and even smile—though palely. He stretched out his hand to Moira and held her hand in his for a moment. “I’m thankful that we got here in time to hunt off those black devils, Moira,” he said, lightly; “but I don’t think that they will annoy you again. Come along into the house and make us a cup of tea. I declare I’m dead beat.”

Moira looked at him gratefully.

She understood.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BECKONING OF THE STARS.

They went into the homestead.

Naringa, scalded and blinded, had groped his way out from the verandah and had departed, taking with him the dead body of the black who had been shot in the act of climbing through the window. The brothers surveyed the scene in the kitchen with astonishment—the smashed window panes, and splintered shutters, the door into the passage still barricaded by the heavy dresser, the cauldron on the log fire and the empty iron bucket standing beside it. Moira told them rapidly what she had done.

“By the Lord, Moira,” said Tom, with honest admiration, “you are a brave girl.”

“It was dear old Tom who saved you, Moira,” said Syd, with a sudden burst of candour, for he could not bear to sail under false colours. “It was he who raced all the way to get to you in time. He even left Billy and the young mare struggling in the watercourse rather than stay to help them out. And he reached the homestead just in time to bring down the buck who was getting through the window. It was a long shot, too—and a good job that he did not miss it.”

Moira came straight over to where Tom was sitting, and kissed him on the forehead. “Tom,” she said, with a quiver in her voice, “I believe you are the noblest-hearted man alive.”

“’Pon my soul, Moira, you’ll spoil me if I stay here,” said Tom, cheerily. He rose to go. “Hullo,” he said, “there’s Billy at last. I’ll go and see what has happened to him.”

Tom walked—just a little unsteadily—towards the door, leaving Syd and Moira sitting side by side in the room that had so lately been besieged. The long spear that had been hurled by one of the bucks was still sticking in the wall opposite the window. Tom walked out of Moira's house, and in the same moment, as he confessed to his desolate heart, out of her life also, leaving his brother Syd—the much-loved, constantly-protected "little Syd" of long ago—in full possession.

The boy Billy, with his round eyes goggling with excitement and alarm, was leading the leg-weary mare to the shed that served as a stable. She had had more than enough galloping for one day. He told Tom his story. He had walked the mare three miles along the bed of the watercourse before he reached a place where he and the mare could climb out. Then he had made the best of his way to the homestead, keeping a sharp lookout for the blacks all the time.

"You did not see wot they done to old Ben, Mr. Tom," said Billy, in a shaky voice. "Me t'roat gets like the sole of me boot when I thinks of it."

Tom was still talking to Billy when Con Burke himself rode up. He had been away to the far end of the run, and he was staggered to hear of the attack by the blacks, and of Moira's narrow escape. He ran off to the homestead to see Moira, and to learn her experiences from her own lips.

"Come along, Moira," he said, when she had finished her thrilling story, sitting beside Syd Verner and holding his hand, "let's all ride over to Coonara, and tell Mr. Verner. He will be anxious to hear what has happened. Our three men came back with me, from the out-paddocks, and they can look after the homestead while we are away. I don't fancy the blacks will come near the place again after the tremendous lesson that they have had."

So the two Verners and Con and Moira all rode off together in the cool of the evening, heading for Coonara.

nara. But Moira rode beside Syd, and what they talked about Con Burke did not know, because he was too far in front of them to hear.

But Tom Verner, who rode beside Con, could make a good guess. He was a silent companion during the long ride, for he was revolving a great plan in his mind.

When they reached Coonara it was dark. Henry Verner was sitting with Juana and Aileen on the verandah, waiting anxiously for their return. He had his gun across his knees. He heard the sound of cantering hoofs, and coo-eed vigorously. Tom and Syd both sent back a cheery answer, and in a few minutes the stirring tale of the day's adventures was being told again by Moira, with interpolations from Tom and Syd.

Aileen sat next to Con Burke, and Moira sat next to Syd, but Tom stood up by himself, and looked out into the sky—a dark blue velvet sky sprinkled with diamonds. His gaze was fixed on the Southern Cross, low down near the horizon.

The points of fire were beckoning to him.

Con Burke and his sister Moira gladly accepted Juana's invitation to stay the night at Coonara, and, wearied out by the excitement of the day, the young people retired to rest soon after supper—but Tom still stood on the verandah, gazing at the Southern Cross, which was calling to him.

Juana came to him and took him by the hand. "Tom, dear," she said, "you are unhappy, and I know the reason. I am so sorry, for you, my own dear lad."

So Tom told her everything in his simple, straightforward way. It was true that he loved Moira, but Syd loved her too; and in the soul-revealing crisis brought about by the attack of the buckeeners Moira's love for Syd was disclosed with staggering clearness.

"But what then will you do, my Tom," asked Juana, with tears in her eyes.

"I am going away from home, mother," said Tom,

"for a little while, at any rate. Afterwards, if all goes well, I will come back to you."

"But where will you go, my Tom?" asked Juana, in sad bewilderment. She dreaded the thought of losing her eldest son, who was born amid the rattle of the guns, at Toulouse.

"I am going yonder," said Tom, pointing southward, where the starry cross lay close to the horizon. I am going down to that fine new country in the south. I am going to Port Phillip."

When Henry Verner came out to bring Juana in from the verandah Tom told him everything, and Verner, who felt a strong bond of sympathy uniting him with the son who had been born at the close of that great campaign of long ago, reluctantly consented.

Cheerily next morning Tom set about preparing for his departure.

But first the three young men had to perform a solemn duty. The dead body of old Ben still lay in the hut unburied.

So Con Burke and Tom and Syd Verner, taking tools and spades with them, drove down to the old shepherd's hut and made a rough bush coffin of sawn wood. They placed in it the body of the victim of the buckeeners, and dug a grave close by on the bank of Lewis Ponds Creek. There they buried him, and Henry Verner, with Juana, and Aileen and Moira Burke, came and stood by the grave. Henry Verner read a prayer, and the three young men fired a volley from their shotguns over the last resting place of the old shepherd.

But even in death old Ben was not destined to remain undisturbed. There came a day when strangers were to invade his solitude and rudely move his bones.

When the bush funeral was over Tom announced to all that he intended to make a trip to the new settlement down in the south. Tales of Mitchell's wonderful journey to Portland, where he found the Hentys on their prosperous station, had already penetrated to Bathurst, and stories of the settlement that Batman

and Fawkner had founded on the banks of the Yarra, and of the rich land that was to be obtained down south almost for nothing, flew from lip to lip.

Tom spoke sturdily of the magnificent prospects at Port Phillip, and Syd never dreamt for a moment that his brother's love for Moira was the real cause of his hurried departure. Deep down in her heart Moira knew the reason of the sudden resolve, but she kept her own counsel. She never told Syd. What would be the use. Henry Verner and Juana talked the matter over together, and came to the same conclusion.

When Tom left the beautiful home where he had spent so many happy years and started for Sydney to take passage there in the schooner *Stella* for Port Phillip, he said good-bye bravely enough to his father and mother and sister Aileen, assuring them that he would soon return. But the parting from Syd was harder. Both the brothers were strongly moved. Their lives were linked together by ties of daily companionship and closest intimacy. Recollections of the past rushed to the minds of both—recollections of events in which Tom was always the helper and Syd the helped. And now they had to part at last.

"Cheer up, Syd, old boy," said Tom, with the old protecting look in his eyes. It won't be long before we meet again. Say good-bye for me to Moira. So long, dear lad. I'm leaving you to look after the old folks till I come back again."

And then he went away, but the real reason of his going Syd Verner did not find out until long afterwards.

As Tom Verner said good-bye to his brother and rode off on the first stage of his journey, lured by the beckoning of the Southern Cross, a strange scene was being enacted, in a lonely Californian valley, through which flowed the Sacramento River. Snow lay deep on the ground. An icy blast whistled down the valley. On a rough bunk in a tattered tent, an old man lay dying. He had left the sunshine of Australia for the

snows of the Sierra. Pneumonia had seized him in its deadly grip.

"Bend down your ear, Mr. Hargraves," he whispered, huskily; "there's something I want to tell you before I die."

"You're not going to die yet awhile, Jim," said the other man, cheerily, making an effort to reassure the sufferer. But Jim was under no delusion.

"I'm sent for all right, Mr. Hargraves," he whispered. "But listen. We've got no gold in this God-forsaken valley. We'd have done better if we had stayed at home in our own country. There's plenty of gold within gunshot of the old place on the Bathurst Plains."

"Poor old Jim! His brain is wandering," said Hargraves to himself, and the dying man read the unspoken words in his face.

"No, Mr. Hargraves," muttered Jim. "My memory is quite clear. Before I came over here with you I found gold myself in New South Wales. I never told anyone, but I'm going to tell you now." His face was quite blue. He could hardly speak. Hargraves poured a little brandy into a cup and moistened the dying man's lips with it.

"Where was the place, Jim? Where was the place?"

Old Jim half raised himself on his elbow. He pointed Southward, with extended arm. "Down south," he muttered, with a last effort. "Down south, under the Southern Cross. At the meeting of Lewis Ponds Creek and Summerhill Creek. You know the spot, Mr. Hargraves. You know the spot, where the two boys of Mr. Verner's used to play—long ago."

Old Jim, the shepherd who had gone with Edward Hammond Hargraves from New South Wales to California in the great rush of the "forty-niners," fell back dead; but his dying words to Hargraves set in motion a train of great events that brought Tom Verner and his well-loved brother Syd together again at last, though far from the old home of their boyhood.

CHAPTER XIII.

GOLD-FEVER BREAKS OUT.

Tom's letters came to Coonara very irregularly, for the mails were few and far between in those days. He wrote that the new settlement at Port Phillip was experiencing a wave of depression, and that many people were leaving the country. He had decided not to take up any land for the present. And then one day there came a letter to his father, in which Tom said that he had yielded at last to his old craving to be a soldier. He had enlisted in the 40th Regiment.

"As you were a soldier yourself, father," wrote Tom, "you will understand how I have always loved the army. I can never forget that I was born on the march. Tell mother not to grieve for me, because I am very happy here now, and I like the life so much that I have no desire to leave it."

"I always felt, my Henry," said Juana, as she read the letter again and again, dwelling with loving eyes on the handwriting of her eldest son, "that Tom would turn soldier in the end. The rattle of the drums was in his blood, I think. Shall I ever forget that long march, on my little white burro, all the way from Vitoria to Toulouse, where Tom was born on the last day of the war."

"Indeed, it seems like destiny," said Henry Verner. "Tom would always leave everything and everybody to watch the soldiers. I was like that myself once, so I can hardly wonder at him. I warrant that he will be a good soldier, too, and a brave one. Cheer up, Juana, dearest. We will go down to Melbourne and see him in the spring."

But they did not go to Melbourne in the spring, because great events happened almost at their doors, and they stayed to watch the surging flood of humanity that swept over the country, destroying old landmarks and threatening to sweep away their second son upon its raging flood.

The new era in Australia was ushered in by a long, dry summer of unprecedented heat, and on the 6th of February came Black Thursday, when the greater part of New South Wales and Victoria was on fire, and when thousands of head of stock and not a few hapless human beings who were caught and cut off perished in the flames.

A few days later, as Syd was riding through the country, that bordered upon Henry Verner's property, pointing out to Moira Burke, who rode beside him, the ravages caused by the bush fires, he came with his companion to Lewis Ponds Creek. And there was the very pool almost dried up now after the long, hot summer, into which he had fallen when he was a small boy, and from which Tom had saved him, diving for him after he had sunk. Sydney Verner told the story again to Moira, and Moira's eyes filled with tears. Dearly as she loved Syd, she could never forget that chivalrous elder brother, who had saved her from the buckeeners and who went away, from his home when he found that her love was not for him, but for Syd.

As Syd and Moira rode along the bank of Lewis Ponds Creek, deep in their thoughts, they became aware of a tall man with grizzled hair and beard, who stood in the bed of the creek, attended by a lad, whom they recognised as the son of the landlady of the little inn at Guyong. The tall man had a tin pan in his hand. He was washing the clay from the bed of the creek in it, and pouring off the dissolved clay and water with a circular motion that presently got rid of all the contents of the dish, leaving it quite empty.

No, not quite!

A residuum of shining, yellow grains lay at the bot-

tom of the tin dish. Syd could see it quite plainly from the top of the bank.

"Hullo, Mr. Hargraves. Where have you been for the last couple of years, and what are you doing down there in the creek?"

The tall, grizzled man looked up with a smile. "Ha! Verner. I see you've caught me fairly. I've been away in California, looking for gold; and now I find that it was here in abundance all the time, close to my old home and yours." He carefully scraped the yellow grains out of the tin dish and placed them in a small glass bottle, which was already half full of gold dust. "This is a red-letter day for Australia. I shall be a baronet. This lad, who has acted as my guide, will be knighted, and my old horse grazing over there will be stuffed and sent to the British Museum."

Gold!

The fever of it leaped into Syd Verner's veins. Sliding from his horse, he questioned Hargraves breathlessly.

"I reached Sydney from San Francisco only last month, in the barque *Emma*," said Hargraves. "I was in California for more than a year. I've been up in San Joaquin and to the Sierras—on the Sacramento and the Feather River and the Yuba. I put in a h——l of a time there—travelled hundreds of miles, been attacked by grizzly bears, been nearly frozen to death, been within a coo-ee of starvation many a time. But I found gold, and I saw the lie of the country—slates, quartz, granite, and red soil, just the same as here. That's why I came back. And now I've got it, I've got it, I've got it!"

He executed a wild war dance in the bed of the Lewis Ponds Creek, and Moira watched him with amazement. She watched Syd with amazement, too. He was completely enthralled by Hargreaves and his story. All the way back to the homestead Syd talked of Hargraves and the gold that lay in the drift of the creek bed.

Hargraves returned with his guide to Guyong the

same night, and wrote a report of his discovery to Mr. Deas Thomson, the Colonial Secretary; but he was back at the creek next day, and Syd Verner joined the little knot of men who began pan-washing under his directions. Syd had the gold fever very badly indeed. He attached himself to Hargraves and went with him, and the two local youths who accompanied him as guides—Lister, the son of the landlady at Guyong; and James Tom—on a prospecting trip down the Summerhill Creek, all the way to its junction with the Macquarie. They got gold almost everywhere along the creek.

Then Hargraves tried the Macquarie River itself. He got gold there, too. Ascending the tableland from the Macquarie with him, Syd Verner could see the Turon Mountains in the distance.

Thither he travelled with young Lister and James Tom, and returning to the Macquarie, found Hargraves there, and reported to him that his prediction was fulfilled. There was gold on the Turon; they brought a few ounces back with them in proof.

Mr. Deas Thomson sent up Mr. Stutchbury, the Government Geologist, to see Hargraves, and examine into the genuineness of his alleged discoveries. Mr. Stutchbury arrived, and Syd Verner watched him dig out a pan full of "dirt" from a spot in the bed of the Lewis Ponds Creek within a few yards of the site of the original discovery. Mr. Stutchbury washed the dirt in the pan and got good gold. He repeated the operation several times at different places in the Summer Hill Creek and the Lewis Ponds Creek, and almost invariably found gold in the pan.

The genuineness of the discovery was assured, and the rush was not long in coming.

Oh! those wild months in the bitter winter of 1851, when men began to stream over the Blue Mountains from every part of Australia and from every country in the world to Ophir and Tarshish—so named by Hargraves—in search of the yellow metal, for which many of them bartered life—and even desecrated death.

It was in the early days of the Ophir rush that the bones of old Ben, the shepherd, who had been killed by the buckeneers, were rudely disturbed. Both banks of the creek were taken up for several miles, and a party of Italians had pegged out a claim which included the area upon which stood the shepherd's grave. They sunk a shaft down through loose earth, which had evidently been previously excavated, and to their amazement came upon a rough coffin of slabs. Pietro's pick went through the lid of the coffin, and disclosed the face of the corpse. Pietro was horribly frightened, and scrambled out of the hole as fast as he could, but Giuseppe, who was working the cradle, insisted that the occurrence of a corpse in a claim was an indication of extraordinary luck. After hauling out the coffin by means of their windlass, the Italians continued digging, and bottomed on the clay a couple of feet below the dead man's resting place. They took out seventy ounces of gold from the ground under the coffin, chiefly in the form of small slugs and waterworn nuggets.

If Tom and Henry Verner had excavated the ground a couple of feet deeper when digging a grave for old Ben, they must have found this "jeweller's shop," and won the fame that so soon afterwards was reaped by Hargraves.

As for old Ben, it mattered nothing to him. The Italians replaced the coffin, and the corpse that it contained, after they had cleaned up the pocket of nuggets, and then they filled in the excavated ground again. Possibly old Ben's last sleep was disturbed by a swiftly-passing dream—a dream of dark faces and flashing eyes and joyful exclamations. But that was all. He could turn to his rest again with the long, long night of eternity before him.

So Verner surrendered himself to the frenzy of the time. Dazzled by the golden gleam he gave up father and mother and sister, and even Moira Burke, his beloved, to follow it. He followed it to the Turon, to the Abercrombie, and to half a dozen different rushes

on the Macquarie. He found a little gold—just enough to whet his fierce craving for more.

Disappointed diggers began to stream back over the Blue Mountains, cursing Hargraves as the author of their miseries. Syd Verner went with them, for he had heard wild tales of fabulously rich discoveries in Victoria—at Clunes and Anderson's Creek, at Mount Alexander, at Buninyong.

Camping with the friendly owner of a bullock wagon at Mount Vittoria—that place which was named after the battlefield in Spain, where his father and his mother had first met many years before—Sydney Verner climbed a great rock by the side of the track and looked out into the night. Mount Vittoria is the highest point on the Blue Mountains—a natural observatory. His gaze travelled far through the starlit sky.

On the winding road were long lines of twinkling camp fires, lit by diggers seeking or returning from the land of their golden hopes. But in the midnight sky, far off and low on the horizon to the southward, burned the four great stars of the Southern Cross, the beacon that had beckoned Sir Thomas Brisbane to New South Wales with the alluring promise that he would be the first astronomer to chart the southern heavens,—the celestial wonder that Tom and little Syd had examined through the big telescope in Governor Brisbane's Observatory at Parramatta, under Mr. James Dunlop's direction, the constellation that had already summoned Tom southward, with its pointing finger, to Port Phillip.

Syd Verner saw the four great stars that he knew so well—white stars blazing against the deep, dark blue—and he made up his mind there and then to follow them. There came into his mind the memory of the "Jewel Cluster," that Mr. Dunlop had spoken of, just above that second great white star, called Beta Crucis. He could not see the "Jewel Cluster" with the naked eye, but he knew that it was there. Where there were jewels there must be gold. Syd Verner dreamed that

he would find it, if he followed those stars that called him southward.

When he reached the city of Sydney he wrote to his father and mother, telling them of his resolve. His gold-digging at Ophir and on the Turon had already provided him with enough money for his enterprise. He wrote to Moira, too, assuring her of his love, and promising to return to her very soon with his fortune made.

Moira read the letter with a gesture of sadness and disappointment. How happy she had been before gold was found in the Lewis Ponds Creeks. The last few months had brought pain and disillusion. What was gold compared with love? And now the gleam of the gold had lured her lover from her side altogether. He was going away to seek it in distant Victoria. The perils that awaited him there she could only dimly guess. But of one thing at least she could be sure. If he met his brother, Tom, over there, Tom would protect him from danger. He had always done so since they were children. He would do so again—if the occasion ever arose—for her sake as well as for the sake of "little Syd." Of that she was well assured.

So she went to look for Aileen, and in comforting her to assuage the sting of her own grief. Aileen was very unhappy, too, for Con Burke, after asking her to be his wife, had succumbed to the gold fever, and had gone away to Turon. Since his departure Moira had been staying with the Verners at Coonara, leaving Pretty Plains to be looked after by the overseer. She could not stay at the homestead by herself, and the kindly hearted Juana insisted that she should stay at Coonara until Con returned. The two girls consoled each other as best they could, and earnestly wished every day of their lives that the madness of the gold fever had never invaded their homes, and lured their lovers away from them.

CHAPTER XIV.

DIGGERS IN MELBOURNE.

The sailing vessel that Syd Verner took passage in for Port Phillip was a slow and unwieldy little tub greatly overcrowded with diggers. She took three weeks to make the voyage to Hobson's Bay, which was thick with masts, as she came up the South Channel and dropped anchor off Williamstown.

When Syd Verner and a party of his shipmates at last reached Melbourne, after a tiresome journey along the bank of the Yarra, which was crowded with traffic, they found the town fairly humming with excitement. Although Syd was familiar with the diggings in New South Wales, the roaring life of the city was quite new to him, and he felt uneasily with his fingers for the belt that he wore under his shirt—the belt that carried all his money. He wore the customary dress of the diggers—cabbage tree hat, blue flannel shirt, and moleskins.

Reaching the foot of Queen Street, he paused opposite "Rag Fair," the *al fresco* bazaar where immigrants were selling their varied and incongruous possessions set out on the turned back lids of their sea chests. Cash was the one thing needful—cash to buy picks and cradles for the diggings and flour and stores to support life until the expected fortune was acquired. Syd bought a first-rate London-made double-barrelled gun for £5 from an anxious immigrant, and also a big American six-shooter. There was no telling what emergencies might be met with.

The great rush that had set in from the Turon, as well as from other places to Ballarat, included for the most part a good class of diggers, law-abiding men who had

no sympathy with the disorderly element, but Syd Verner had not been in Melbourne many hours before he heard stories of the outrages committed by the Van Demonians—ex-convicts from Van Diemen's Land, who roamed the country, plundering the diggers of their stores on the way to the goldfields, and robbing them of their gold as they returned. It was very necessary to be well armed against these assailants, and also against the rough element in the city.

Lieutenant-Governor Latrobe, who was charged with the onerous duty of administering the newly-constituted colony of Victoria in the early part of the gold-discovery period, was almost in despair owing to the wholesale defections among the police, who joined in the rush to the diggings, leaving the whole place so utterly unprotected that in January of 1852 he penned an urgent despatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, asking for military aid. The aid was forthcoming.

The indignation at the imposition of license fees was already breaking out among the diggers, but Latrobe was in a very difficult predicament. If he enforced the license fees he irritated the section which was rapidly becoming the largest part of the population, but if he relinquished the licenses he had no means of carrying on the Government of the goldfields. The New South Wales Government had already adopted the license system at the Turon and Macquarie River diggings in accordance with the opinion of the law officers, who advised that the Crown had an indefeasible right to all gold found in public or private lands. In order to preserve the rights of the Crown, and to obtain revenue, they recommended the issue of monthly licenses, empowering the holders to dig for gold; these licenses being regarded officially not as taxation, but as rent. A similar form of license for Victoria was promulgated by Latrobe in August, 1851. Mr. Latrobe upheld his view, but it turned out in the long run to be an untenable one.

Syd Verner was one of those who took a share in demonstrating that it was not in accordance with public opinion in a democratic community, and was therefore doomed to fail, but this demonstration was not effected without an outburst that at one critical period came near to wrecking the authority of the Crown, at any rate, temporarily, in one of the most important regions of Australia.

With those stirring events of the old digging days, the lives and loves and fortunes of the Verner family, and particularly of the two brothers, Tom and Syd, were interwoven in a most strange and fateful manner.

In those first hours of Syd Verner's brief sojourn in Melbourne, he was dominated by one impulse and master passion. The gold-hunger had temporarily driven out every other emotion. Even his thoughts of Tom and his memories of Moira became dim and indistinct in comparison with the urgent impulse to form a party, acquire the necessary equipment, and undertake the toilsome journey to the new diggings at Ballarat.

So, with his four shipmates, all of whom he had met and worked with on the Turon, Syd walked up Queen Street with the immigrant's revolver in his belt and the immigrant's double-barrelled gun in his hand, and stared in bewilderment at the tumultuous life that surged through the roaring city. The streets were crowded with wheeled vehicles, bullock drays, and horse drays that churned up the roadway, so that the fierce north wind blew thick clouds of dust down towards the river, on the opposite side of which he could see the white tents of Canvas Town. The sidewalks were filled with a jostling crowd of both sexes, who paid no attention to Syd Verner or his mates—Barney Brannigan, Horace De Lacy, Jim Dunn, and Angus McIvor—all of whom had caught the infection as badly as Syd himself, and were eager to be off to the diggings.

It was not without difficulty that the party made their way down Collins Street to the intersection of

Elizabeth Street. They were bound for Bourke Street; their objective was the horse bazaar. The first essential for the journey to the diggings was the purchase of a horse and dray.

The broad, straight line of Collins Street, which is now one of the stateliest city thoroughfares in the world presented a strange scene in the early part of 1852. As Syd Verner and his mates made their way along the uneven sidewalk they ran no inconsiderable risk from the hoofs of half-wild horses bestridden by bearded bushmen, who were not at all particular where they rode. Bullock drays, heavily laden, ploughed down the middle of the street, and the bellowing of the bullocks, the loud cracking of innumerable stockwhips, and the imprecations of the teamsters, made up a terrible din. Every kind of vehicle, from costly carriage to humble wheelbarrow, helped to fill the street from kerbstone to kerbstone, and the sidewalks carried the most extraordinary amalgam of humanity ever seen in Australia.

Gold, the great leveller, had swept away all class distinction, and Syd Verner hurried along almost hypnotised by the prodigal display of wealth that he saw around him. At intervals the pedestrians surged together in knots and small jostling crowds, as the human units were shaken into new patterns in the great kaleidoscope by some unexpected picturesque or sordid or thrillingly dangerous street incident.

As Verner and his party approached Elizabeth Street, one of those miniature rushes took place, and Barney Brannigan dashed forward to see and report the cause. A digger, with earrings in his ears and his huge, gnarled fingers adorned with costly rings, had cleared a space on the sidewalk, and was dancing a grotesque jig with a much-bedizened female companion arrayed in a red satin gown surmounted by a blue silk opera cloak. The bystanders jeered or applauded as the mood took them, but presently surged on in an excited rush towards the Elizabeth Street corner, leaving the digger and his

companion dancing without their audience. The cause of the new rush was a street accident. A man had been knocked down by a drover riding an unmanageable brute that had bucked right in among the crowd.

A swift eddy in the jostling throng carried Syd Verner to the edge of the sidewalk. He saw two of the passers-by lifting the white-faced, prostrate victim to his feet. The sufferer's hat had fallen off, his eyes were closed, and there was blood on his mouth. Verner recognised him in a flash. It was Con Burke, of Pretty Plains, Moira's brother, whom he had lost sight of for many weeks. Con, like himself, had been swept into the great human tide that was setting towards Ballarat.

Pushing his way through the throng, Syd took Moira's brother by the arm and dragged him into the friendly doorway of a chemist's shop, where the sufferer speedily recovered. He had escaped with a nasty cut on the mouth. He explained that he had ridden overland, following Hawdon's old stock road from Yass, crossing the Murray at Howlong, and emerging at last at Heidelberg. He had left his horse up at the horse bazaar in Bourke Street.

"Come along," said Syd, eagerly, linking his arm in Con's. "That's just where we are bound for; you must join our party."

Con Burke gladly agreed, and at once made the acquaintance of Brannigan, De Lacy, Jim Dunn, and McIvor. Together, they made their way round to Bourke Street with the object of buying a horse and dray.

In Bourke Street the scene was even busier than in Collins Street, for the neighbourhood of the horse bazaar was crowded by excited diggers, with all their troubles before them, and their fortunes yet to make; while Collins Street was the parade ground of those who had returned victorious and triumphant from the goldfields. Great business was doing at the horse bazaar, and for some little time both Syd and Con were content to watch the devices of the knowing sellers

and the easily gulled immigrants, who were no match for them.

Not for nothing was the horse bazaar located on the side of the stiff hill running up from Elizabeth Street to Queen Street. That hill formed a splendid test of staunchness, as the eager buyers could see readily enough when it was pointed out to them by the astute people who brought their horses to the bazaar to be sold. An animal that could drag a heavily loaded dray up that stiff pinch was just the horse that any man of common sense would choose for the arduous journey to Ballarat, 75 miles away, or the new rushes further north, which were even a greater distance from Melbourne.

In front of Syd and Con, at the foot of the hill, in the middle of the roadway, stood a horse-coper volubly addressing an irresolute immigrant, whose white hands and too-fashionably cut clothes proclaimed him the natural prey of the horse dealer. The copper was explaining to his client the merits of a dejected, slab-sided animal harnessed to a heavy cart loaded with timber.

"But his front legs are frightfully bowed, by Jove," said the immigrant, doubtfully, as he put up his eyeglass and surveyed the horse with ill-concealed apprehension.

"They're best like that," explained the copper swiftly. "You'll always find that an 'orse wot 'as 'is forelegs nicely arched is the best for pullin' a big load. It 'elps 'im to get a purchase on the ground, ye see."

"But his ribs are sticking out through his skin, and there's a nasty lump on his hind shin," continued the immigrant, critically. He had heard strange tales about horse dealers, and he did not intend to be taken in, not he.

"The 'orse is in good 'ard training," retorted the copper, with lofty pity for the ignorance of his customer. "Did ye ever know a race 'orse go on the course mud fat? That there 'orse is fit to pull three ton; look at

the muscles in 'im. An' as for that bit of a cut on 'is stifle, if ye knew anything about an 'orse at all, ye could see how he done it. Racin' over fences; that's 'ow 'e got that there little cut. 'e was a steeplechaser last year, and a fine bit of blood, too."

"How much do you want for him?" asked the immigrant, hesitatingly.

"Only eighty pounds," replied the coper, with alacrity. "an' I can tell you on my word of honor as a man that ye won't find another 'orse like 'im for work in the 'ole colony."

Syd nudged Con, and they grinned in concert.

"I'll tell ye wot I'll do now," said the coper, with the air of a man struck unexpectedly by a generous thought. "I'll give ye any trial in reason. Will ye take the 'orse at eighty pounds if 'e pulls that there load of timber up the 'ill from the bottom to the top without a touch of a whip or the sign of a jib?"

Barney Brannigan looked at the horse and whistled softly. He knew a horse when he saw one, and if ever he saw a foundered brute in his life, this was one. "Let's stay and watch," he whispered to Syd, who was getting tired of the comedy, and Syd consented.

The immigrant again surveyed the horse with obvious doubt, and bending down, felt the animal's forelegs with a knowing air. "If he does the trial as you describe it," he said to the coper at last, "I'll give you eighty pounds for him. I'll ask these gentlemen to be good enough to act as judges, and decide whether the horse performs the task according to the conditions." He courteously introduced himself to Syd and Con as Dr. Leslie Smallpage, late of Bloomsbury, London.

"If that harrse pulls that load up that hill," remarked Barney Brannigan, sotto voce, "I'll ate him, shoes an' all,"

The coper went over to the dejected, lop-eared, hungry-looking animal in the shafts, and loosened the cheek strap of the headstall. Next he took up the chain traces a couple of links. The lop ears pricked up, and a

look of intelligence—one would almost say of determination, came into the vacant eyes. The animal actually pawed with one bowed leg upon the roadway as if eager for the ordeal to begin.

Barney Brannigan observed this sudden change in the animal's demeanor with amazement. The horse appeared to be really alive after all.

The coper patted the horse's skinny neck, and then stood back as the animal visibly braced itself for a great effort.

"Giddap, Smoker!" ejaculated the coper, bringing his hands together with a sharp clap.

Smoker threw all his weight into the collar, and, bending to his work, scrabbled furiously with his iron-shod toes on the road. The timber-laden cart began to move slowly up the hill. The bowed forelegs planted themselves convulsively with quick steps forward on the steep incline, and the hind toes dug desperately into the macadam. The coper walked beside the horse, clapping his hands together, and speaking words of encouragement.

"Good old Smoker! Giddap, ole boy. Now, then, lift her along!"

It was a wonderful demonstration of grit and staunchness. Up the hill for the short distance from Elizabeth Street to Queen Street that scarecrow of a horse dragged the timber-laden cart, nor did the coper once touch the devoted animal with the whip. Reaching Queen Street, Smoker stopped of his own accord. His breath came in quick sobs. His heaving flanks were streaming with sweat.

Giving the horse a few minutes to recover himself, the coper turned him round and led him back halfway down the hill to the great wide entrance of the horse bazaar. He backed the cart into a corner and led out Smoker.

"Well, wot did I tell yer?" exclaimed the coper triumphantly. "'e done the trial all right, didn't 'e?" The judges nominated by the customer assented with

some misgivings. They could hardly believe their eyes.

So the sale was completed, and for eighty pounds Dr. Leslie Smallpage, of Bloomsbury, became the happy possessor of the phenomenon. He had already acquired a dray from Smoker's owner, and he made arrangements to start with his party from the horse bazaar for Ballarat on the following morning.

As the coper departed with his customer to wet the transaction over a glass of liquor, Syd Verner, Con Burke, and Barney Brannigan strolled over to the open stall at the far end of the bazaar to have another look at the wonderful horse that had upset all their preconceived ideas of equine capacity. At the same time De Lacy, Dunn, and McIvor walked across to cast a glance at the loaded dray that Smoker had pulled up the hill.

It struck Syd Verner as odd that the equine scarecrow should be enjoying a magnificent feed of oats. Oats were expensive at that time—a good deal more expensive than wheat. Also there was half a bucket of chopped-up carrots in the manger. The horse coper had fed the animal with unparalleled generosity. Verner was frankly puzzled. Certainly the slab-sided animal had been well rewarded for its brief but strenuous effort. Verner felt vaguely that there was more in the incident than met the eye. Was it possible that Smoker had been carefully trained to put forth every effort in the sure and certain hope that he would be liberally rewarded with oats and carrots when the task was completed?

While he was still pondering over this problem, a shout from Brannigan reached him. "Begob, shure 'tis a false bottom that's in the kyart," roared Brannigan, excitedly, "an' there ain't more than a hundredweight av timber in ut altogether, though it looks for all the wurruld as if there wuz half a ton."

Verner speedily satisfied himself that this reading of the situation was correct. The cart had been faked as well as the horse. Smoker had been carefully trained to make a short, sharp effort in order to obtain the re-

ward of a splendid feed, and the cart had been doctored, so that the light load appeared to be a very substantial one.

"I'm afraid that Dr. Smallpage will be disappointed with his bargain," said Verner, grimly, "but he has nobody to blame but himself. And the trick was clever enough to take in even a bushman."

"Shouldn't wonder if we meet the doctor again," added Con Burke, thoughtfully. "He said that he was going to Ballarat."

Verner, who was tacitly acknowledged as the leader of the party, picked out a good, strong horse of the half-draught type from the miscellaneous collection for sale at the bazaar, and after some haggling got him for £60, each member of the party contributing his share of the purchase money. A capacious dray filled with a canvas tent was acquired in the same way, and the rest of the day was occupied in purchasing stores—flour, sugar, tea, tobacco, horse-feed, blankets, a cask of corned beef, a tent, picks, shovels, pans, a cradle, buckets, ropes, and a bush-carpenter's rough outfit. McIvor undertook to sleep in the dray, which was to be left for the night at the horse bazaar, and it was arranged that an early start should be made next morning.

In the evening Syd and Con strolled round the city and mixed with the jostling crowds. The streets were not lit by lamps after dark, but by a regulation of the Government every hotel-keeper was compelled to exhibit a light over his front door. There were so many hotels in the principal thoroughfares that the effect was much the same as if the streets were illuminated with lamps. In 1852 there were over one hundred hotels in Melbourne.

Syd and Con, in going round the town, went into a couple of hotels—one in Bourke Street, and the other in Elizabeth Street—where "free and easies" were announced. These very rough entertainments were quite the vogue, and were well patronised, since there was no-

thing else to see. In the first, the orchestra consisted of a piano and violin, which accompanied songs that were sung by everyone who cared to oblige. In the intervals between the songs the pianist and the violinist, more intent on noise than on tune, pounded and rasped out dance music or negro melodies. The audience consisted of women as well as men, and there was a good deal of rough horse-play. In one corner, as Syd and Con entered, a digger, with the solemnity of semi-intoxication, was performing a grotesque pas seul, and in the inside of the great bare, unfurnished room a jig was in progress. The women were tricked out in costly finery, and the hilarity of the assemblage had plainly an alcoholic origin.

In the next "free and easy" that was visited, the orchestra included a cornet, a piston two or three horns, and a big drum, which the drummer thumped with maddening effect. The increased volume of sound attracted an increased assemblage. The diggers liked noise, and their heavy, hobnailed boots thumped the floor in hornpipe and reel to their own entire satisfaction.

Syd and Con soon had enough of it, and they went back to their dray in the horse-bazaar for a sleep before starting on the journey.

CHAPTER XV.

OFF TO BALLARAT.

Rising at dawn from their blankets spread under the dray, they found the whole of the party ready to start. Brannigan and Jim Dunn had aching brows, as a result of their potations on the previous evening, but after sluicing their heads in a couple of buckets of water they speedily recovered. Con Burke arranged to share his horse with Syd, riding turn and turn about, and the others set out to walk beside the dray, which the big powerful draught horse pulled easily.

The road lay through the grassy glades of North Melbourne, where the prospective streets were marked out, and alignments indicated, though houses were few and far between. It was at the foot of the North Melbourne hill that Syd Verner's party saw their acquaintance of the previous day again—Dr. Leslie Smallpage, of Bloomsbury. He was belaboring that dejected animal, Smoker, with a heavy strap, and using most unprofessional language at the same time. Four other men, all members of Dr. Smallpage's party, and all equally ignorant of horse-craft or practical horsemanship, stood beside him vituperating the patient beast in the shafts of a waggon that, with its load, must have weighed nearly a ton. The beating had no effect whatever upon Smoker. He merely offered a passive resistance to the tyranny of his tormentors.

Several other drays passed by the stranded vehicle, the drivers loudly jeering the white-handed new chums, and shouting "Joe, Joe" in derision—the cry that was used on the diggings to indicate the presence of any per-

son whose fashionable clothing announced pretensions to gentility.

As Syd Verner was pointing out to Dr. Smallpage that the task of pulling the loaded dray was utterly beyond the strength of the obviously exhausted horse, an obliging carter put in an appearance leading a rough little cart mare of a useful type, and offered the animal for sale. He would accept the useless Smoker and the sum of £60 in addition, for his cart mare, which would pull the waggon easily. Smallpage was compelled to accept the offer, since there was nothing else to do. So the money was paid over, and the transfer made. The new purchase exhibited a tendency to kick as well as bite, but she was a good worker, and she hauled the doctor's dray up the North Melbourne hill at the first attempt. As for the carter, he went off, chuckling, with the rejected "Smoker."

Barney Brannigan, as he looked after the departing stranger, and the dejected animal that he was leading, scratched his head thoughtfully. "Shure, I'm after seein' that same felly at the horse-bazaar, yisterday," he said to Dunn, "an' I misdoubt him intirely."

"How's that?" inquired Dunn—a man of much muscular power, but little perception.

"'Tis my belafe," said Brannigan, casting another glance at the retreating man and horse, "that he is in wid the felly that sold the harrse to young Sawbones beyant. Belike, he's what they call a confederate, if ye know what that is. Do ye?"

"Not me," said Dunn, the dunderhead, cutting a pipeful of tobacco as he made ready to resume the journey. "Wot's a confederate?"

"Wan that helps the other thafe," explained Brannigan, concisely. "That felly beyant there will take old Smoker back to the bazaar in Bourke Street, and I shudn't wondher if the copar that sold him to the Sawbones yisterday for £80 will be selling him to a merchant or a lawyer to-morrow for a hundred. 'Tis a trained harrse he have there, an' the copar can make

more goold out of him in a month than he could get on the diggings.

And Barney Brannigan was right.

Resuming their journey, Syd Verner's party soon left the grassy paddocks of North Melbourne behind them, and crossed the winding chain of waterholes, called Moonee Ponds, and so through Flemington and Essendon, across high plains intersected by deep creek beds to the Saltwater River.

Thence the road led to the little township of Keilor, and past paddocks covered with a monstrous growth of huge Scotch thistles as high as a man on horseback. The thistles were moving like corn in the wind. A few miles further the route to Ballarat left the main Mount Alexander Road, and turned westerly, becoming a mere unmade bush track that ran between post and rail fences on either side. The ground had been greatly cut up by the heavy traffic along it, and was almost like a ploughed field. The big draught horse struggled stoutly on through the deep soil, with frequent short spells of rest, and at last the party emerged from between the fences into the great bare Keilor plains, and began to climb the grassy slopes of Pentland Hills. After crossing the ridge, they reached the flat, rich land of Bacchus Marsh, and there by the side of a winding creek bed, with occasional waterholes, they unyoked the horse and camped for the night, spreading leaves under the dray for a bed, and wrapping themselves warmly in their blankets. They kept a big fire burning all night, and two men with loaded guns were always on guard, for bushrangers were overrunning the whole country, and vigilance was the price of safety from their attack.

Next day, travelling through stringybark country, they reached Ballan, and camped not far from the township.

"I wonder where dear old Tom is now," said Syd Verner to Burke, as they sat by the camp fire, smoking on the last night of their journey before reaching

Ballarat. "I wish I could have seen him when we were in Melbourne. Tom always hankered after soldiering. In fact, he seemed a born soldier."

"That's exactly it," said Burke. "A born soldier is just what he is." He remembered Juana's story well enough. He recalled how she had told it to him long ago when he was quite a boy—on the day when little Syd was lost in the bush, and when Tom found him with the cattle standing around him as he lay at the foot of a big gum-tree, miles and miles away from the homestead of Coonara.

Syd was silent for a few moments. "I should like to know what Moira is doing at this minute," he said, "and whether by any chance she is looking at the same stars that we see up there, and thinking of us."

Con Burke did not answer. His thoughts were far away—with Aileen.

Tall trees, silvered by the starlight, stood all around the camp, and looking southward through a vista in the trees Syd saw the Southern Cross again. Yes, there it was; the beacon that had drawn him far to search for the gold that he hoped to find beneath the "Jewel Cluster" of Kappa Crucis. The Southern Cross was just as far away as ever, but at least it had guided him to Ballarat. The gold-fever burned in his veins again. To-morrow he would reach the goldfields, the richest goldfields that the world had ever known. As he looked up into the velvet blue of the summer night, where the Southern Cross was shining, it seemed to him that the constellation had exercised a subtle but potent influence on his life, ever since as a child he had first looked at its four great stars through the big achromatic telescope in Governor Brisbane's Observatory at Parramatta. And now at last the stars had led him to the door of a treasure-chamber crammed with unimaginable riches. Syd Verner quivered with anticipation—wondering what the treasure chamber had in store for him.

It was late next evening when the dray reached Bal-

larat. The men pitched their tent, and then attended at the Gold Commissioner's office, where they received licenses, authorising them to dig for gold for a period of one month on payment of a fee of £1/10/- apiece. Provided with these essential documents, they sallied forth and joined in the strange and stirring life of the most eventful and romantic period in Australian history.

Verner and Burke and their mates achieved very moderate results at first. Others struck rich pockets in adjoining claims, but Fortune refused to smile on the men from the Turon. They made good wages, but that was all, and good wages merely amounted to bitter disappointment for Syd Verner. Was it for good wages that he had left his home and the girl of his heart? A thousand times no. But want of success, so far from quenching the gold-fever, actually inflamed it, and when the party broke up, and De Lacy and Dunn, Brannigan and McIvor drifted away to join fresh combinations, Syd Verner and Con Burke went far afield together.

They joined in every new rush. They went to Forest Creek, to Mount Alexander, to Creswick, and to Bendigo. And wherever they went they found the mutterings against the licenses, and against the rigour with which the law was administered growing and gathering strength. The daily "digger hunts" were fiercely resented, and the sight of diggers arrested by the troopers and chained to logs when they were found without licenses, stung the general body of the gold-seekers to madness. Cases occurred of diggers being chained to logs and left there all night. Such things were unendurable.

The ideas of 1848, that "year of revolutions," in Europe, were still in the air. Indeed, not a few of the diggers came from countries whose rulers were glad enough to see the turbulent spirits depart for other climes. The diggers had no Parliamentary representa-

tion, and the cry of "no taxation without representation" carried a very real significance for them.

Public meetings began to be held. Harangues were delivered from many a stump against the police and the Gold Commissioners. Spokesmen of the diggers sprung up by magic, and the angry protests penetrated to Melbourne.

Troops were moved to Ballarat.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MURDER AT THE EUREKA HOTEL.

One night in early spring, Syd Verner sat in his tent writing by the light of a candle stuck in an empty bottle. Con Burke was out. He was attending an informal gathering of angry men in very muddy clothes, who were discussing the advisableness of establishing a Diggers' Congress. An unsuspected aptitude for politics of the most vigorous kind had flared up in Con Burke. He was one of the most vehement of the speakers in the advanced section of the dissatisfied diggers.

Syd took advantage of Con's absence to write a letter to Moira. He wrote to her regularly every week now. If one had peered over Syd's shoulder as he sat on a candlebox industriously writing, one might have read this:—

October, 1854.

My Own Darling Moira,

Here I am, sitting all alone in the tent and thinking of you, and longing for the day when I shall see you again. It will be very soon now, I hope. Con and I have done wonderfully well this week. After a bit of prospecting in Dead Horse Gully we settled down there and bottomed on the clay on Monday. We took out nearly ten ounces a day till Friday, and then had to stop on account of the heavy water, but we will soon bale it out, and get going again. I have sent to Geelong for larger buckets. You ought to see this place now. The whole field is covered with red, yellow and white earth heaps, and most of the holes are half full of water. An unfortunate kiddie, only three years old, fell into

one of them yesterday, and though the mother reached it, she was not in time to save it, and it was drowned. The poor woman is almost mad with grief.

Everything is getting quite civilised now, and there is plenty of money about—not like last year, when the storekeeper used to give me change in small potatoes, which counted at threepence each. There are about 20,000 people on the field, and we have all the luxuries of civilisation. Quite close to our tent is the Eureka Hotel, which has actually got a bowling alley at the back. We have plenty of fun, but this digger-hunting business is getting the men very angry, and goodness knows where it's going to—

“Here, get out of this, old man; can't you see I'm busy?”

“All ri' (hie), no offensh. Thought you was the bloomin' pub, thatsh all.”

Syd's letter-writing was brusquely interrupted, and he had to lay it aside unfinished, while he endeavoured to persuade his casual visitor to move on elsewhere.

But the visitor was really very exasperating. He sat down on Syd's bunk to explain the situation. He had been spending the day with a friend, and he had drunk so much liquor that he was intolerably thirsty. “Musht ave a drink fore I gome,” he explained, earnestly wagging a very dirty forefinger in Syd's face.

“Well, you can't get a drink here, old man. I tell you straight, I have'nt a drop of stuff in the place.”

“Spose I can get shum upat—the bloomin'—pub,” said the visitor, leering at Verner vinously.

“I'm sure you can if they'll let you in,” said Syd, encouragingly, “but I expect the Eureka will be shut by this time. However, you might as well try. It's your only chance.”

“Oh, I'll get in all ri',” hiccoughed the visitor. “I'll get inter the Eureka Hotel to-night—or bust. I will, indeed, sure's my name's James Scobie.”

He staggered out, roaring,

“Shdauld acquaintansh be forgot
An’ never brought to mi—i—ind—”

and Syd went back to the candlebox and resumed his letter.

But he hadn’t written half a dozen lines when he heard a loud banging and thumping on a door not far away.

Mr. James Scobie was trying to get into the Eureka Hotel sure enough. The banging and thumping continued, and Syd, with an exclamation of annoyance, put away his letter, and went to the front of his tent to listen. It was impossible to write with that noise going on.

As he stood outside the tent he could see camp fires burning here and there—on Black Hill Flat and Gumtree Flat, on Specimen Hill, and on Bakery Hill. The night was dark and chilly. Little knots of diggers had gathered round the camp fires, and were discussing their grievances—the digger hunts, the license fees, the fact that they had no voice at all in making the laws by which they were taxed and harried. Syd could see the dark forms of the men as they passed in front of a campfire a few hundred yards away. He could see a man who had mounted a stump and was haranguing the assemblage with vehement gestures.

“Look’s to me very much like Con Burke,” muttered Syd Verner to himself as he stared at the distant orator. Then he turned his head and surveyed the dark outline of the Eureka Hotel, in the front of which a big lamp was burning.

The lamp threw its light upon the front door, which was shut. Mr. James Scobie was still hammering and banging upon the door with unabated persistence. “Lemme in,” he roared as he kicked the door with his heavy hobnailed boots, and then he added with drunken irrationality, “I won’t go away till ye let me in, Bentley, so ye may as well do it at once.” Bang, bang, bang, went the hobnailed boots on the door.

A window was raised immediately above the front door of the hotel, and a bullet head was thrust out.

What the blazes are ye making all that noise for at this time of night? Get to h——l out of that, or I'll shift ye pretty quick."

"Lemme in and gimme a drink, an' then I'll gome," replied Mr. Scobie, raising his eyes to peer at the bullet head above him. But the bullet head was withdrawn, and the window was closed with a thud, so that Mr. Scobie's only resource was to go on punishing the door with his ironshod boots. He continued this proceeding for fully five minutes, yelling out at intervals some highly insulting comments on the landlord's past life and present habits. "Come down, ye d——d thief, an' lemme in and gimme a drink. I know all about you, Jim Bentley. You've done time, that's wot you've done. Ow did ye like Norfolk Island when you were there? Eh, tell me that."

Thump, thump, thump. Fists as well as feet were hard at work on the door of the hotel now. Syd Verner was just about to start for the hotel, in order to attempt to persuade the drunken digger to go off to his own tent, when he saw the bright spurt of a match through the window of the room above the door. Then a candle was lighted.

"He's coming down at last to let him in, thank goodness," muttered Syd Verner. "Now there'll be a bit of peace." He went back into his tent and set to work again on his letter to Moira.

"The men on this field are a real decent lot, take them on the whole," wrote Syd, "but the cruel wrongs that they are suffering from the Commissioners and the police, have put them into a very nasty temper, and I shouldn't be surprised if we have some lively times here soon. There is no actual disloyalty in them, and when Sir Charles Hotham, the Governor, and his lady visited this place lately, the diggers gave them a splendid reception. One big chap, an Irishman, too, insisted on carrying the Governor's lady across all the wet

patches, so that she would not get her feet muddy. But all the same they won't stand being chased and chained to the logs much longer. I think it only needs a small spark to make a very big blaze on Ballarat. Almost anything might do it now, and if there was only

"Ha! What was that? A wild shriek, and then silence! Next moment a door banged loudly.
——"

Syd Verner rushed out of his tent and looked instinctively towards the Eureka Hotel. He could just make out the dark outline. The lamp was burning over the front door, but there was no candlelight to be seen in the room immediately above it. The whole of the house was in darkness. Mr. James Scobie was quite silent now.

But Syd Verner was strangely disquieted. If Scobie had been admitted to the hotel what was the meaning of that wild shriek, and then the banging of the door? Syd covered the distance between his tent and the Eureka Hotel at a rapid pace. He met several other men running in the same direction.

"What's up?" "What's the matter?" "Anybody hurt?" Everybody was asking questions, but nobody was answering them, because nobody knew anything.

Syd was the first to reach the hotel. A dark figure lay face downwards on the ground a few yards from the door. It was limp, huddled, motionless.

Syd Verner and Bill Tregarthen between them turned the body over on its back. Jim Scobie would never disturb anybody again. Still thirsty and clamoring for that last drink, he had gone into the presence of his Maker. There was a terrible wound in his head, a great gaping hole that looked as though it might have been made by a blow from a pick.

"This is a bad business, mate," said Bill Tregarthen, kneeling beside the body and looking across it at Verner. "Do 'ee know who done it?"

"No, I do not," said Syd. "I don't know for certain, but I have a strong suspicion."

"That dirty dog in the pub there, I suppose," said Tregarthen, shaking his fist angrily in the direction of the Eureka Hotel.

Syd Verner nodded his head.

The two men lifted the body carefully and laid it down at the side of the road, so that it could not be run over by any passing cart. Then they set off for the camp to report the matter to the police, but before they had gone far they met a couple of mounted troopers on patrol duty, and reported the occurrence to them. The troopers returned with them, and took charge of the body. Also they knocked peremptorily at the door of the Eureka Hotel, and continued knocking until the landlord came down in shirt and trousers, rubbing his eyes, and demanding to know what was the matter.

"I reckon you know what's the matter well enough, Jim Bentley," said Bill Tregarthen, grimly. "That man,"—he pointed to the motionless figure lying on the ground across the road—"was heard knocking at your door and trying to get in to get a drink a few minutes ago, and now he is dead."

"Well, I know nothing about it," said Bentley. He was very pale, and his voice was shaking. "What has it got to do with me?"

"That will do, Tregarthen," said the trooper, sharply to Bill. "Now, look here, Bentley?" he added, "I want a statement from you about this, and I am going to ask you some questions. It is my duty to tell you that you are not obliged to answer these questions, but what you do answer will be taken down by me in writing, and may be used as evidence against you."

So the two troopers and Syd Verner and Bill Tregarthen went into the Eureka Hotel, and Bentley lit a lamp in the bar parlour. The senior trooper took out his pocket book and wrote down Bentley's extremely halting and inconclusive statement. Then they left the hotel, and after making arrangements for the temporary disposition of the body, rode off to the Camp to report the case to Sergeant Major Milne, in charge of

the police, taking with them the landlord of the Eureka Hotel, who was arrested on suspicion, and charged with being concerned in the murder of one, James Scobie, said to have been a digger.

Syd Verner went back to his tent, a good deal shaken by the terribly tragic and sudden end that had overtaken his unwelcome visitor, and finished his letter to Moira.

During the days that succeeded the murder of Scobie the diggers to a large extent suspended operations on their claims and devoted themselves to discussing the tyranny under which they suffered—and concerting measures with the object of securing justice.

Justice! Yes, that was what they did not get. But they intended to get it. Syd Verner found himself one day listening to a dark-haired, impetuous Irishman, a certain Peter Lalor, native of Queen's County, whose father had represented an Irish constituency in the House of Commons. By sheer forcefulness of character this man, Lalor, was already accepted as a leader. He was one of the foremost spirits in the Reform League. He mounted a stump and addressed a gathering of several hundred men.

"Men, and brother diggers," said the dark-haired Irishman, "an event has lately happened among us that cannot be passed by in silence, because it shows us with unmistakable clearness that the fount of justice on this goldfield is poisoned at the source."

Here the speech was interrupted by a wild burst of applause, and Syd Verner himself felt impelled to wave his cabbage-tree hat violently round his head. He was powerfully moved by the speaker's magnetic eloquence.

"This ruffianly scoundrel Bentley," continued the orator, leaning forward and letting his eyes range over the multitude of bearded faces in front of him until his gaze rested on Syd Verner, "has been acquitted by a bench consisting of Dewes, the presiding police magistrate; Rede, the Commissioner; and Johnston, the assistant Commissioner, though it is only fair to say that

Johnston dissented from the finding and expressed his dissent in the strongest possible terms."

Another outburst of wild applause, followed by cheers for Assistant-Commissioner Johnston.

"Yet, I see before me amongst you now," continued Lalor, his voice rising and reaching to the extreme limit of the gathering, "one of the men whose evidence on the subject must have been conclusive to any honest mind." He riveted Syd Verner with his gaze amid a chorus of exclamations of assent, and Syd at once felt that he, too, was an important link in the great chain of events that were clearly about to connect Ballarat with history.

"There is no moral doubt, and there is no legal doubt," continued Lalor, with tremendous emphasis, "that the man, Bentley, murdered that unfortunate digger, James Scobie, in a most brutal, callous, and wanton manner."

The crowd was quite certain on that point. A tumultuous roar of confirmation endorsed the speaker's statement.

"But there is something more to be said," continued Lalor, with deep and concentrated feeling, "and it is this. There is no moral doubt, and, to my mind, there is no legal doubt that the man Dewes, police magistrate and president of the bench, is in close personal association with the prisoner, Bentley; is personally indebted to him; and is consequently guilty of gross corruption and abuse of his office in acquitting Bentley, whom he knows to be guilty."

A yell of rage went up from the assemblage of diggers, when they heard this. They had not heard it before, except as a mere suspicion. But they trusted Lalor implicitly. They were convinced that he told them the truth.

A general rush was made in the direction of Specimen Hill, on which the Eureka Hotel stood. Thousands of diggers joined the hurrying crowd. They came from all parts of the field—from Canadian Gully and Black-

hill Flat, from Dead Horse Gully and Eureka Lead, from Frenchman's Gully and Bakery Hill. There were not less than 10,000 diggers assembled outside the ill-starred hotel where Jim Scobie had been murdered when other speakers mounted stumps and urged the excited men to avenge the blood of the murdered man and punish the murderer.

In many varieties of accent, but with wonderful solidarity of feeling, the orators played upon the emotions of their hearers, spurring them by sharp and trenchant words into action. Hayes, the Irishman, and Vern, the Hanoverian, and Raffaello, the Italian, each took a turn in addressing that stormy gathering, and then in one moment a rush was made for the hotel.

"Burn down the accursed place and the murderer inside it," yelled somebody, and the suggestion was eagerly adopted with wild yells of approval.

A man carrying an armful of paper and rags ran round to the bowling alley that adjoined the hotel, and in an instant leaping tongues of fire that licked the doomed building caught the sight of the crowd. The diggers were so intent upon watching the hotel burning that they did not see a white-faced bullet-headed man dash out from the burning building and leap on a horse that was standing saddled and bridled in the yard behind the hotel. But they saw him when he emerged from the yard and headed away at full gallop for the Government Camp.

It was Bentley, the acquitted slayer of luckless Jim Scobie, and as the crowd saw him disappearing as hard as he could pelt in the direction of the camp, they melted rapidly away, leaving that sinister house of blood, the Eureka Hotel, a prey to the greedy flames.

Before the soldiers and police summoned by Bentley to protect him could reach the scene of the diggers "wild justice," the Eureka Hotel was completely gutted, and the menacing crowd had utterly vanished away. However, the police arrested three men—McIntyre, Fletcher, and Westerby—and charged them on the in-

formation of Bentley with incendiarism. Syd Verner had a narrow escape himself of being arrested along with them, for he was well acquainted with McIntyre, and had been standing quite close to him when the orators were addressing the assemblage.

If only the police had arrested him then and sent him to Melbourne to be tried with the other three men, the tragic experience that was even at that time looming up to involve him might have been averted.

CHAPTER XVII.

MUTTERINGS OF THE STORM.

"I simply can't bear it any longer, mother." It was Aileen who spoke, and Juana listened with a troubled air, for she was greatly troubled herself. The long absence of her two sons weighed heavily upon her heart.

"But what can we do, my Aileen?" said Juana. The silver streaks were showing in her hair, but she still kept the freshness of her emotions, the tenderness of her heart. And, for that reason she suffered with her daughter, whose lover had left her to pursue the gleam of gold, almost as much as she grieved for the loss of her two stalwart sons.

"I have been talking it over with Moira," said Aileen. "She is as anxious to see Syd as I am to see Con. We have made up our minds what to do. I am going to ask father to let us go to Victoria. We can travel from Melbourne to Ballarat quite easily now, and when we get there Syd and Con can take care of us."

Ah, little bush-bred Aileen! She was much in love, but poor indeed in experience of the world. Juana sighed as she looked at her daughter, and stroked her shining hair.

"My Aileen," she said, softly, in the presence of such innocence, "what you would like to do is impossible. Young girls cannot travel alone to meet their lovers, and, indeed, the country is so full of wild characters now that you could not even make a journey from here to Sydney by yourselves in safety."

Aileen's eyes filled with tears. She had set her heart on making the journey with Moira, who was so courage-

ous and resourceful. Surely a girl who had defended herself single-handed against a whole tribe of blood-thirsty buckeeners was a trustworthy escort for a mere journey on the beaten track from the Bathurst Plains in New South Wales to Ballarat in Victoria.

But Juana showed her that the plan was impossible. "Still if your father would go, too, and take me with him," she added, "it might be done." Memories of the old campaigning days crowded in upon her. What were the hardships and dangers of a journey from the Bathurst Plains to Ballarat compared with the sufferings and perils of that tremendous march—punctuated by battles—from Vittoria across the Pyrenees to Toulouse.

"Oh, mother, darling, do ask him," said Aileen, clasping her mother by the hand, and reading the sympathy in her shining eyes.

So that evening Henry Verner, grey-haired now, but still sturdy and vigorous, underwent a siege. His wife, his daughter, and Moira Burke conducted the attack, and they pressed it home with such relentless perseverance that he was obliged to surrender.

Long after Aileen and Moira had retired to the big room that they shared together, Henry Verner and Juana sat up, discussing the plan of campaign. Finally Verner decided to place his overseer in charge of the station, and to drive his wife and the two girls down to Sydney in his light American waggon. They would do the journey in three days, camping the first night at Hartley Vale, at the foot of Mount York, and the second night on the Nepean River, at the other side of the Blue Mountains. He would take one of the black stockmen along with him to drive the waggon home again, and at Sydney they would embark on one of the sailing ships that were constantly leaving with diggers bound for Port Phillip. Once in Melbourne, it would be an easy matter to travel to Ballarat. In November they would have no floods or swollen creeks to battle with, and as Cobb & Co.'s coaches were already

running to the goldfields, there would be no necessity to buy special transport in Melbourne.

Verner became thoroughly interested in the journey that was before him. He even permitted himself to speculate upon the prospect of being able to find a few nuggets with his own pick at Ballarat or Creswick or Fryers Creek. But he did not impart these vague ambitions to his wife or daughter, both of whom detested that seductive pursuit of gold-digging, which had already ensnared too many of their men folk.

"We shall travel very comfortably, I think," said Verner to his wife, "and it won't be anything like as bad as it was in the old days in Spain. Do you remember the little white burro, Juana, that you used to ride?"

Juana did remember it, and many other things besides, in that distant past. Especially did she remember her little son, who was born at Toulouse amid the rattle of cannon, and who was now a soldier in the 40th Regiment. Juana's heart yearned for her two sons, but the elder of the two was linked so closely with the great and stirring romance of her girlish days that her thoughts flew first to him. Besides, she knew that he loved Moira. He had given up the girl and quietly effaced himself when he knew that she loved his brother Syd. Juana was glad indeed to go to Victoria, where she would see her firstborn son again.

Next day Henry Verner, with his wife and the two girls, set out in the American waggon for Sydney, and Long Jimmy the black stockman rode in front of them and helped them to make their first camp at the foot of Mount York, and their second on the Nepean River. As soon as they reached Sydney a visit to a shipping office in George Street brought to light the fact that the barque *Britomarte*, Captain James Callaway, was due to sail at daybreak on Saturday for Port Phillip. There were a few berths still vacant, and Verner hastily secured a couple of cabins.

The *Britomarte* was accounted a fast sailor. In spite of being considerably delayed by headwinds, she made the run from heads to heads in eight days. But a terrible disappointment awaited Juana. The 40th Regiment had been ordered away from Melbourne, for the country was in a very disturbed state, and Sir Charles Hotham, the Governor, was being besieged with requests from all the disaffected centres for troops. In the circumstances, Verner decided to push on at once to Ballarat and see Syd.

Melbourne was almost like a deserted city in October and November, 1854, for every man who could scrape up enough money to get to the diggings had given up his job and gone there. The shopkeepers and publicans were anxiously looking forward to Christmas. That was the season when the diggers came down to the city, and they seldom left it until all their money was gone.

Verner found comfortable lodgings for his party in Bourke Street. On the first day of their stay they learned the disquieting news of the murder of James Scobie, at the Eureka Hotel, Ballarat, and the burning of the hotel by a mob of thousands of diggers, who were infuriated at the acquittal of Bentley, the hotel-keeper, by Mr. Dewes, the Police Magistrate, who—as was now remembered—had been the magistrate who originally granted Bentley the license for the hotel, and who was strongly suspected of being a secret partner in Bentley's business.

"I hardly think that the country is safe for travellers," said Verner, discussing plans with his wife and the two girls. "How would you like to stay down here in Melbourne until we see what is to be the upshot of all this angry feeling?"

But Juana, Moira, and Aileen raised such a chorus of objections that Henry Verner was obliged to listen to them. It was hopeless to expect Aileen to remain in Melbourne while Con Burke was at Ballarat, and it would need more than Verner's eloquence to persuade Moira that it was impossible for her to go to Syd.

And so, with some misgivings, Verner engaged seats in Cobb & Co.'s coach for Ballarat for the following Monday morning. He learned with satisfaction that Bentley had been re-tried in Melbourne, convicted of manslaughter, and sentenced to three years on the roads. Also that his supposed associate, Dewes, the Police Magistrate, had been dismissed from the service.

"That ought to settle the trouble," said Verner to Jack Bennett, the clerk in Cobb & Co.'s office. But Jack Bennett shook his head doubtfully. "I hardly think so," he said. The Government is terribly stiff-backed over the trouble. They are determined to prosecute those three men—McIntyre, Fletcher, and Westerby—on the charge of burning down the Eureka Hotel, and the trial is to be held in Melbourne, because they know that no jury would convict the men in Ballarat. If they gaol these three men you'll find that the diggers won't take it lying down."

Hum! Henry didn't suppose that they would. They had no representation in the Legislative Council, which consisted mostly of members nominated by the Government, and included no representatives of the goldfields. They had to obey the law, but they had no hand in making it. They had to pay taxation, and very heavy taxation too, but they had no voice in imposing it.

Jack Bennett expressed some doubt whether the jury would convict McIntyre, Fletcher, and Westerby, but if they did—well, it would be a case of "look out for squalls."

When he left the coaching office Verner was more doubtful than ever as to the wisdom of taking his wife and the two girls up to Ballarat, where wild disturbances and scenes of disorder seemed to be imminent.

Two days later the three men, McIntyre, Fletcher, and Westerby were convicted by a Melbourne jury, who added a strong recommendation to mercy, on the ground that the outrage was provoked by the improper conduct of the Ballarat officials. McIntyre was sentenced to three months, Fletcher to four months, and Westerby

to six months' imprisonment. The announcement of the sentences created apprehensions in Melbourne, and uproar in Ballarat. Henry Verner postponed the contemplated journey, in spite of the tearful protests of his wife and the two girls. The outlook was very black.

"It is no good, Juana," he said. "I cannot expose you and the girls to the dangers that may be in front of us if we go to Ballarat in the present state of excitement among the diggers."

"But, my Henry, is not our son, Syd, already there?"

"Yes, yes. But just think a moment. How could a few police and a handful of troops maintain order if 20,000 diggers get out of hand? Ballarat would be no place for women then."

Juana gave a shudder. She remembered certain tales told to her long ago round the camp fires in the Pyrenees by Biddy Flynn. Biddy had followed the troops into Badajoz. She had seen things to make the heart stop beating. But Juana was a soldier's wife and a hero's daughter. She put all fears behind her. "I am not afraid, my Harry," she said, quietly. "I do not think that the diggers would hurt us. I should like to go to our son, and the girls must come too. If there is fighting at Ballarat there will be work for women—afterwards."

Verner surrendered after that. It was the only thing to do. He made arrangements with Cobb & Co. for seats for Juana, Aileen and Moira on the 26th of November.

Scarcely a pick was put into the ground at Ballarat on the day that news of the conviction of the three diggers for incendiarism reached the goldfield. The Reform League quickly got to work, and among the most energetic and fiery of the speakers who urged that the release of the prisoners should be demanded forthwith were Syd Verner and his mate, Con Burke.

Syd. and Con. had both done remarkably well out of a new claim in Sailor's Gully. They sent away a big

consignment of gold by every Government escort to Melbourne, taking receipts from the Commissioner. Their deposit receipts now represented very considerable sums that each of them had lying to his credit in the Melbourne Treasury. But indignation at the tyranny and oppression of the Government and at the proved corruption of an important Government official drove all thoughts of gold out of their heads. They were both strong supporters of the Reform League, and they rushed off to attend a gathering which was being held at Specimen Hill to discuss the situation.

Neither love nor gold occupied a great place in the thoughts of either of the men from the Bathurst Plains at that crisis. It was not that Syd. did not love Moira, or that Con. Burke did not love Aileen, but the fiery indignation that was sweeping through all the goldfields in Victoria had for the time being cast out love. The determination not to be down-trodden was the dominant idea of Syd. and Con.

It was largely through the passionate eloquence of Burke, who mounted a stump on Specimen Hill and addressed the diggers on their rights, as well as through the less rhetorical but equally forcible advice of Syd. Verner from a similar post of vantage that a decision was arrived at to send Kennedy and George Black down to Melbourne to interview the Governor and demand the release of the three men who had been sentenced to imprisonment.

Syd. Verner and Con. Burke were among the crowd of diggers who assembled to watch the departure of Kennedy and Black on their momentous mission, and a very excited gathering it was.

In the tense moments that preceded the departure of the delegates, while Lalor and Hayes and the other leaders of the Reform League were consulting together, Con. Burke shouldered his way to the front, and was greeted with encouraging cheers by the diggers, who recognised him as one of their most earnest spokesmen.

"Go on, mate. We're listening to you," someone shouted.

So Con. climbed into an empty cart that stood near, and spoke a few words to the departing delegates. He bade them remember that they represented the whole body of the diggers at Ballarat, and that when they met Governor Hotham they would express not merely their own demands, but the demand of 30,000 men, that McIntyre, Fletcher and Westerby should be released instantly. "And if that request is not granted, boys," he cried in a voice that carried far, "we shall know what steps to take in our place here to protect our rights and liberties, and to defend ourselves from brutal oppression and tyranny."

A very distinctive feature of the landscape was Mr. Con. Burke, as he stood up in the empty cart, exhorting the diggers to defy the Government. His figure caught the eyes of the spies from the Government Camp at once, and his heated language reached their ears. They carefully noted both his name and his remarks, and reported them to Captain Thomas, who was in charge of the troops. They also reported the fact that his mate and intimate associate was a certain Sydney Verner, a native of New South Wales, and late of Bathurst Plains.

Destiny had thrown her net round Syd. as well as Con. Both were now classed definitely among the insurgents.

When Kennedy and Black reached Melbourne they presented to Governor Hotham a demand in the name of 30,000 diggers for the liberation of the three men who had been convicted of incendiarism in burning down the Eureka Hotel, and were at that moment serving their sentences in gaol. Governor Hotham recognised the importance of the occasion. He had not the slightest intention of falling short in what he conceived to be his official duty, or of allowing the course of justice as laid down by the Crown to be deflected by a popular outcry. But being a careful and conscientious Governor,

he resolved to fortify himself with the counsel of the highest judicial authority in the colony of Victoria.

So, when Kennedy and Black, with aggressiveness and determination written in every line of their earnest physiognomies, were admitted to the presence of the Governor, they found themselves face to face not only with Sir Charles Hotham, but also Chief Justice Stawell.

The representative of the power and majesty of the Crown and the inflexible guardian of the prestige of the law opposed their collective will most solidly to the demands of Kennedy and Black. A "demand" to the Chief Justice that prisoners who had been convicted by a jury and sentenced by a judge should be released at the behest of a mere mob, appeared to be little short of an intolerable outrage. But Chief Justice Stawell, though a choleric man by nature, knew how to be courteous. Seated beside the Governor, he listened in perfect silence to the earnest but heated statements of the delegates, who did not hesitate to make it perfectly clear that they were preferring a demand and not a request.

When the delegates had finished stating their demand, which was virtually an "ultimatum," there was a brief whispered colloquy between the Governor and the Chief Justice. Then Sir Charles Hotham, addressing Kennedy and Black, informed them that the course of law and justice in the colony of Victoria was not to be interfered with simply because a number of persons sympathised with prisoners who were paying the rightful penalty of their crime. He was unwilling to believe, he said, that the diggers whom he had himself met during his visit to Ballarat a few months previously, and who seemed to him to be a fine and law-abiding body of men, would resort to open violence in order to defeat the law which prescribed the payment of license fees. But if they were so ill-advised as to adopt such a course, then he could assure the delegates that he knew his duty as Governor of the colony of Victoria, and was fully prepared and determined to perform it.

Kennedy and Black snatched up their hats and hurried towards the door. As Black was following his colleague from the room he discharged a Parthian shot.

"The responsibility will be on your head, Governor Hotham," he shouted, "if before a week has passed away the flag of the Southern Cross is flying over the Republic of Victoria."

That same afternoon Sir Charles Hotham sent instructions to Sir Robert Nickle to despatch a strong body of troops to Ballarat immediately. The men marched at daybreak—a detachment of cavalry, a detachment of Her Majesty's 12th Regiment of Foot, and a detachment of Her Majesty's 40th Regiment of Foot.

Among the men of the 40th Regiment marched Corporal Thomas Verner.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE EUREKA STOCKADE.

When the news of the Governor's refusal to liberate the three prisoners reached Ballarat, a wave of indignation surged over the field, and the Reform League met to discuss the situation. Men's minds were powerfully excited, and counsels of violence were freely uttered. Matters were made worse, when a horseman rode into Ballarat on the morning of 28th November with the news that troops were marching to the diggings and would arrive by nightfall.

At Ballan, the mail coach for Ballarat passed the troops on the march. Verner and Juana and the girls scanned the dusty line of soldiers anxiously. Stepping jauntily along, with his musket on his shoulder, marched Corporal Tom, but the coach went past at a fast trot, and Corporal Tom, with his face thickly coated with dust, was unrecognised. Henry Verner was greatly relieved at the discovery that Tom did not appear to be among the soldiers. There was trouble ahead at Ballarat, he felt certain.

Verner had secured rough accommodation for his wife and the two girls in a weatherboard building, where Mrs. McPherson took in a few boarders—visitors and tourists chiefly, who wished to get a peep at the goldfields during their travels. Thither they retired to rest, after their journey, while Verner set out to look for his son Syd.

It was not an easy job in the disturbed state of the diggings, for the men had entirely discontinued working on their claims, and their tents were deserted. The father searched for his second son in vain. He could

not find him, but near the Warrenheip Gully he came across a stout stockade, built on the Eureka Lead and enclosing about an acre of ground. It was constructed of slabs and strong palings. In the ground so enclosed were many stout holes where men had been digging for gold. The holes were half-full of water. Henry Verner peered between the slabs and saw several tents in the enclosure. Evidently the tents belonged to diggers. He examined the place in perplexity. Surely it was not intended to be used for military purposes. Where were the trenches and earth-works to protect the defenders? A complete lack of military knowledge manifested itself to the experienced eye of the old soldier. The place, he said to himself, could not be held against regular troops for half an hour.

Late in the evening he was making his way back to the lodging-house full of uneasy forebodings, when loud shouts reached his ears from Warrenheip Gully. Wild hurrahs were followed by a ragged volley, and as Henry Verner climbed the rising ground he could see that the troops had arrived and were being attacked in the gully by a large body of diggers.

The diggers, hiding behind logs and boulders, fired into the mass of the soldiers and shot several of them, including a drummer boy who was in the act of beating the "Advance." As the troops charged up the slope, the diggers retreated, but soon crept back and harassed the column with long range shots all the way to the Government Camp.

Henry Verner knew that the die was cast. After that attack a conflict between the full strength of the Government and the diggers was inevitable. He went back to Mrs. McPherson's lodging-house sad at heart and found Juana and the girls waiting for him with white faces. They had heard the firing.

"Oh, I do hope that Syd. was not there," said Moira, clasping her hands together fervently. Aileen was terribly anxious for her brother, too, but her chief concern

was for Con. Burke. If she were to lose him now, she felt that life itself would be unendurable.

Juana and her husband were both very serious. But Juana had been through the strain of battles long ago. She had not forgotten the kindly philosophy of Biddy Flynn. Courage was the great thing after all. How thankful she was to think that Tom was out of it all, and safe down in Melbourne. She did not know that Tom was at that moment cleaning his musket in his quarters at the Government Camp, very tired after the long march and the exciting little skirmish at the end of it, and utterly unconscious that his brother Syd., or his father and mother and the two girls, were at Ballarat.

Next morning Syd. and Con. were up at daybreak. An atmosphere of subdued excitement pervaded the diggings, and as the day wore on they joined the great crowd of diggers who were making their way to a monster meeting at Bakery Hill.

As he drew near Bakery Hill, Syd. Verner saw that a platform had been set up, and beside it a flagstaff was erected. From the top of the flagstaff fluttered a new flag that Syd. had never seen before—the diggers' standard. But Syd. recognised it at once, and his heart gave a great leap. Those four silver stars on a blue ground represented the Southern Cross—the constellation that had drawn him southward, as though by some mysterious influence, with a promise of gold to his heart's desire. It was strange indeed, to see the emblem that he had followed so far quite close to him at last.

Did it mean for him, the end of his long quest?

But Syd. quickly shook off the superstitious fear with which he had looked at first on the diggers' standard that symbolised the realisation of his dreams. He saw many men on the platform whom he recognised—and among them the chairman, Hayes, the most prominent leader in the reform movement. Standing in front of the platform, he and Con. Burke cheered the speakers as

they came forward, and followed their burning utterances with passionate attention.

The two men from Bathurst Plains were conspicuous by their enthusiasm. They cheered the two priests who occupied seats on the platform with the members of the Reform Committee. They cheered every reference to the rights of the diggers, and hissed every comment upon Sir Charles Hotham, Chief Justice Stawell, and Sergeant-Major Milne, the officer in charge of the police at the camp, and the chief promoter of the digger hunts. When Vern, the Hanoverian, came forward and moved a resolution that all present should burn their licenses forthwith, and swear never to apply for another, they cheered more wildly than ever.

So when the resolution had been carried by acclamation, Syd. and Con. helped to make a big bon-fire close to the flagstaff, upon which flew the standard that bore the emblem—the four principal stars of the Southern Cross. And this emblem of the Southern Cross floated above Syd. Verner, as he cast his license into the bon-fire with the others, and so committed himself finally to the conflict that was not to be settled without much shedding of blood.

All that day Juana and the girls remained at Mrs. McPherson's house, for the spectre of battle was already abroad, and no one could say when the fighting would begin. Strange tales were afloat of great armies of diggers on the move from Bendigo and Creswick, and all the surrounding diggings, to join with the men of Ballarat in annihilating the forces of the Government and establishing a Provisional Government.

It was said that a Declaration of Independence had already been drafted by Black, and that a republic was actually in sight.

On the following day, with almost incredible provocation, the authorities at the Government Camp organised a digger hunt, and sent out troops and police to chase the men and demand their licenses. Syd. and Con. were soon in the thick of it. Volleys of stones were

hurled at the police, and a few shots were also fired. The Government forces drew off with a few prisoners, whom they took back to the camp and chained to the logs.

Off to Bakery Hill again sped Syd. and his mate, and saw the diggers' standard hoisted once more upon the flagstaff. They saw, too, that dark-haired Irishman, Peter Lalor—but a Lalor transfigured by an inner fire of enthusiasm. Mounting a stump, he addressed the diggers briefly, disclaiming the possession of special military knowledge, but declaring himself ready to act as their leader if they would have him.

Have him! Of course they would. Syd. and Con. cheered themselves hoarse as Lalor, grasping his gun by the barrel in his left hand and resting the stock on his foot, lifted his right hand towards the diggers' standard and solemnly swore allegiance to the diggers' cause.

Every digger present followed the example, and Syd. Verner found himself lifting his hand towards the emblem that had guided him to the goldfield, and solemnly pronouncing the words of the diggers' oath—"We swear by the Southern Cross to stand truly by each other and fight to defend our rights and liberties."

Then two and two abreast they formed up and set off in a long line to the Eureka Stockade. Syd. and Con. marched immediately behind the diggers' standard, which was carried by Captain Ross, of Toronto. In the stockade, Lalor and his lieutenants took down names, formed squads, and organised drilling, which was begun at once. One of the tents in the stockade was requisitioned for the head-quarters' staff, and parties were formed for patrolling the diggings, visiting the storekeepers, and requisitioning supplies of stores and ammunition. Receipts were to be given for every article that they obtained.

Syd. had his double-barrelled gun, which he bought from the immigrant in "Rag Fair," down in Melbourne, and also his American revolver. Con. Burke had a muzzle-loading American rifle, and a surprisingly large

number of the diggers were provided with firearms of one sort or another. Under Lalor's directions a blacksmith shop was established in the stockade, and a blacksmith was set to work manufacturing pikes with a sharp-hooked projection, to be used for catching and cutting the bridles of the cavalry.

The Government Forces were not idle on their side. Captain Thomas, the senior officer in command, fortified the camp with breastworks of timber, in anticipation of an attack in force, and sent the women and children to the rear.

And so the unhappy day of conflict drew steadily nearer. Henry and Juana and the two girls had seen neither Tom nor Syd. since they arrived on the field. They were still under the impression that Tom had never left Melbourne and was on duty there, with the main body of his regiment. Syd. was still quite unaware of the presence of any of his family on the edge of the battlefield.

Saturday, 2nd December, was a busy day in the stockade. Drill went on at intervals throughout the forenoon and afternoon. Men were put on to construct barricades, consisting of overturned carts, palisades, and rope entanglements outside the main fence. The blacksmith was busy turning out pikes, and Syd. and Con. joined a patrol party, which scoured the country for ammunition and supplies. Friendly butchers came in with carcasses of beef, and there was no lack either of food or drink.

Throughout the day there were not less than 2,000 men in the blockade, but, as the evening drew in, many of them quietly seceded.

Lalor gave "Vinegar Hill" as the password for the night, and it seemed to have a sinister significance for many. At any rate, they began to slip away in such numbers that the "Commander-in-Chief" threatened to have anyone else who left the stockade shot at once, and his "Minister of War," Alfred Black, supported him cordially in his decision. Yet nobody was made an

example of, and Saturday closed in with a sense of coming disaster in the air.

Before midnight, the number of men left in the stockade was under 200. The rest had slipped away, not anticipating attack, some to hold revel, others to go to their own tents. Neither Lalor nor any of his lieutenants expected the troops to make a move before the arrival of the reinforcements, which they knew were coming from Melbourne under Sir Robert Nickle.

But Captain Thomas, of Her Majesty's 40th Regiment of Foot, away yonder in the Government Camp, was a man of soldierly decision. He had spies out who brought him full information as to everything that the diggers were doing. He judged that they did not expect to be attacked until the reinforcing troops arrived, and so determined upon a surprise assault. He made his dispositions accordingly, and a few minutes before three o'clock on Sunday morning he despatched a force of 276 men to attack the Eureka Stockade.

There were 30 cavalry of the mounted corps of the 40th Regiment, and 70 mounted police, as well as 65 infantry men of the 12th Regiment and 87 men of the 40th Regiment. Captain Wise, of the 40th Regiment, Lieutenants Hall and Gardyne, of the cavalry, and Lieutenants Bowdler and Richards, of the infantry, formed part of the column of assault. The balance of the total was made up of foot police.

Captain Wise, of the 40th Regiment, led the infantry attack, while the cavalry and mounted police were sent round to advance from the South and East and cut off the retreat of the insurgents.

Among the sentries posted in the stockade was Syd. Verner. He had relieved a comrade at 2 o'clock in the morning, and was now on duty until 6. He paced up and down on the platform that enabled him to see over the top of the stockade, and he carried on his shoulder his London-made double-barrelled gun, loaded with ball. Each face of the stockade was patrolled by a sentry. Most of the other men were asleep, wrapped in their

blankets on the ground, with gun or pike beside them. Lalor himself was sitting up in the headquarters' tent, writing. Syd. could see the light of the candle through the canvas.

As he kept his vigil, Syd. Verner had much—very much—to think about. He had no illusions as to his position. The stockade would be attacked, if not that night, still as soon as the reinforcing troops arrived from Melbourne. What would be the result of the conflict? Who could tell? As for himself, he would fight to the last, but it was not at all unlikely that he would fall in the battle. What would become of Moira? In that lonely hour he thought of Moira more than for many past months. He had followed the gleam of gold, but had left the light of love behind him. What madness it had all been.

Vern, the Hanoverian, interrupted his meditations. "You see nothing down there, my friend, eh?"

Syd. peered into the darkness. No, he could see nothing. All was silent.

Vern stumbled off to visit the other sentries. Syd. could not help noticing that the man was desperately nervous. He looked round to the headquarters' tent. The candle was out. "The Commander-in-Chief was evidently snatching a brief sleep.

Syd.'s thoughts came thick and fast, as he paced up and down with his double-barrelled gun on his shoulder. Recollections of his boyhood came back to him, loving memories of his father and mother and little Aileen—and dear old Tom. How good Tom had always been to him. How many times in childhood's days Tom had helped him, and had rushed to his aid in moments of danger. If he only came out of this fight alive, he would go down to Melbourne and hunt up Tom. What a great yarn they would have. He began thinking again of all their experiences together. Why had Tom gone off and enlisted like that? He had never been able to understand it. But Tom had been born on the battlefield.

Soldiering was in his blood. It was natural, after all, that he should go to the colours.

"Hola! Verner! ees eet oll tranquil?" "Yes!" The voice was that of Carboni Raffaello, that fiery enthusiast for liberty. He had brought the ideas of 1848 across the world with him to Ballarat. He was patrolling round the stockade. It was a marvel to him that his comrades could sleep in front of the enemy.

"All quiet, Rafaello?" said Syd., in low tones. "It will be dawn in a few minutes now."

The Italian passed on. Already a faint streak of radiance was appearing in the eastern sky. It slowly broadened.

Syd. looked out over the long gentle slope of the ground in front of him. He could see nothing.

He looked again. Surely that was something moving. The soft glow of the dawn penetrated the darkness. Ha! The red coats! The soldiers were upon them.

"To arms!" shouted Syd. Verner, and emptied both barrels of his gun in the direction of the soldiers. Men leaped from the ground all round him, and hurried to their places.

"Where are they?" "Where are they?"

"There, there," cried Syd., pointing to a long line of redcoats deploying at a distance of 150 yards from the stockade.

An irregular volley crashed from the stockade, and the advancing line of redcoats faltered momentarily.

A bugler began to sound the "Charge." But the call was never finished. A bullet knocked the boy over while the bugle was still at his lips.

"Forward the Fortieth." Syd. heard the officer's confident shout, and the cheers of the men running behind him. The diggers heard it too, and poured in a heavy fire upon the troops advancing across the open ground.

"Steady, boys, steady. Reserve your fire, and mark your men. Pick the leaders first." It was Peter Lalor who spoke.

Several of the soldiers fell, but the advance continued, led by Captain Wise, who ran in front of his men moving his sword.

"Come on, men! Come on! Forward the Fortieth." Those were his last words. A bullet struck him, and he fell mortally wounded.

That maddened the troops. In the face of repeated volleys, they charged up the gently rising ground with fixed bayonets, cheering wildly. The defenders were already short of ammunition. Their fire slackened. Many of them had nothing to fire but pistols loaded with pebbles.

The cavalry and mounted police were galloping in from the south and east. The infantry were charging up the slope in front. Syd. Verner realised that the end was not far off. He had lost sight of Con. Burke, but he could hear the ringing words of Lalor adjuring the men to stand fast.

Ha! The foremost files of the infantry had reached the outer barricade of the overturned carts, slabs and rope entanglements. The soldiers scrambled over the barricade and attacked the stockade with their bare hands. They tore down the slabs and forced a breach. Half a dozen of them were inside the stockade already, bayonet in hand, and the diggers fell back in confusion, taking cover in the shallow holes with which the ground was pitted.

Syd. Verner gritted his teeth and grasped his gun. He had fired his last shot. The gun was of no more use, except as a club. Well, he would die game, at any rate.

Through the gap in the slabs he saw two of the stormers rushing at him. One of them was half a dozen paces in front of the other. The foremost came on with glittering bayonet held low at the charge. The light of battle blazed in his eyes. He was burning to take vengeance for his fallen Captain.

Syd. seized his useless gun despairingly by the barrel and whirled it round his head. He gazed fixedly at the on-rushing soldier, with the bayonet. The soldier was

coming straight for him. The bayonet was within a yard of his breast.

God! It was Tom!

Tom was completely possessed by the madness of battle, but he recognised Syd. just in time and dropped his point to the ground, letting the bayonet fall from his hands.

Private Pym, the stormer, who was a few paces behind him, saw his Corporal drop his bayonet by some inexplicable mischance. He also saw a digger apparently about to club the corporal with the stock of his gun. Private Pym brought his musket to the shoulder and aimed hastily at Syd. As he did so, Tom saw him, and once again, as so often in his boyhood's days, the impulse came over him to save "little Syd." from imminent danger.

Tom flung himself in front of Syd. as Private Pym pulled the trigger, and the ball that was intended for the digger buried itself in the redcoat's side. Almost at the same moment, a shot fired from one of the rifle pits, into which the diggers had retreated, took Private Pym in the mouth, killing him instantly.

As the redcoats charged through the breach intent on bayoneting the diggers in the rifle pits, a flying bullet hit Syd. Verner in the shoulder, and he dropped beside Tom.

And so he did not see the trooper who climbed the diggers' flagstaff under a rain of balls, and tore down the diggers' standard—the silver stars upon the field of blue, the Southern Cross that had called the two brothers southward from their home. Syd. was spared that last pang of disillusionment.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE CAMP HOSPITAL.

Neither of the brothers knew how the tide of battle went on that fatal day, when more than forty of the diggers gave their lives for their cause, and when not a few of the soldiers also fell, including that gallant officer, Captain Wise, who had been well known and greatly liked on the field of battle before an oppressive enactment and the corrupt administration of justice drove the disfranchised diggers into the recklessness of armed revolt.

Peter Lalor, who lost his left arm in the fight, was still in hiding with a price upon his head, when Syd. and Tom recovered consciousness, and found themselves in adjoining beds, under medical treatment. Commissioner Rede, on behalf of the Government, received the wounded diggers, as well as the wounded soldiers, into the Camp Hospital, and several medical men, who had been engaged in digging, volunteered their services in attending to the sufferers.

Then it was that Syd. Verner renewed his acquaintance with Dr. Leslie Smallpage, whose bitter experiences in buying a horse at the Melbourne Horse Bazaar had opened Syd.'s eyes, so long ago, to the wicked wiles of the experienced copier.

It was Dr. Smallpage who extracted one bullet from Syd.'s shoulder, and another from Tom's ribs. When the doctor learned privately how Tom had saved Syd.'s life, by taking the bullet intended for his brother, he was with difficulty prevailed upon to hold his tongue about it. However, at last he consented, and as Private

Pym, who fired the shot, was dead, the only witness who could have brought the incident to light was silenced.

Dr. Smallpage had an anxious time with both his patients for a couple of days after their admission to the Camp Hospital. He refused to allow any visitors to see them until the fever abated, and their father and mother and the two girls had to be content with the doctor's bulletins announcing the satisfactory condition of the patients.

A good many of the diggers had escaped after the fight, and were in hiding—among them being Con. Burke, but as Aileen wore a happy face, it was not difficult to conjecture that she at least had found out Con.'s hiding place, and was ministering to his necessities. She managed to tear herself away from that interesting rebel, in order to accompany Henry Verner and Juana and Moira, when they were at last allowed to visit Syd and Tom at the Camp Hospital.

What tears of thankfulness Juana wept as she sat on a chair between the two beds, and held a hand of each of her sons! How proudly she listened to Syd.'s whispered story of those last breathless moments in the stockade, when Tom dropped his bayonet and ran in to cover Syd.'s body with his own from Private Pym's bullet.

Henry Verner, thrilled with pride in his soldier son, though he could not help feeling a glow of sympathy with Syd.'s whole-hearted espousal of the cause of the oppressed diggers. Both of the young men had nobly done their duty—each in his own fate-allotted sphere. Both of them had proved brave men and worthy sons of a father and mother whose love was consecrated amid the thunder of the guns.

When Juana at last rose to leave her sons, Moira took the vacant chair for a few minutes. Syd. had fully realised since that last vigil of his on sentry duty, just before the attack, that the gleam of gold is a poor thing for a man to guide his course by. The star of love was to be his beacon henceforth. He asked Moira's pardon for his long absence in pursuit of the golden lure, and

Moira, of course, forgave him. She loved him too much to complain of him for seeking fortune, as a man is bound to do.

Then she turned to Tom. "How can I thank you, Tom," she whispered, "for all you have done for me?"

"By saying no more about it, Moira," said Tom, with a cheery smile. "I want you to be happy, my dear, and I know quite well that little Syd. will make you as happy as the day is long."

"But what are you going to do, dear old Tom?" A couple of warm tears dropped from the girl's eyes on the back of Tom Verner's hand.

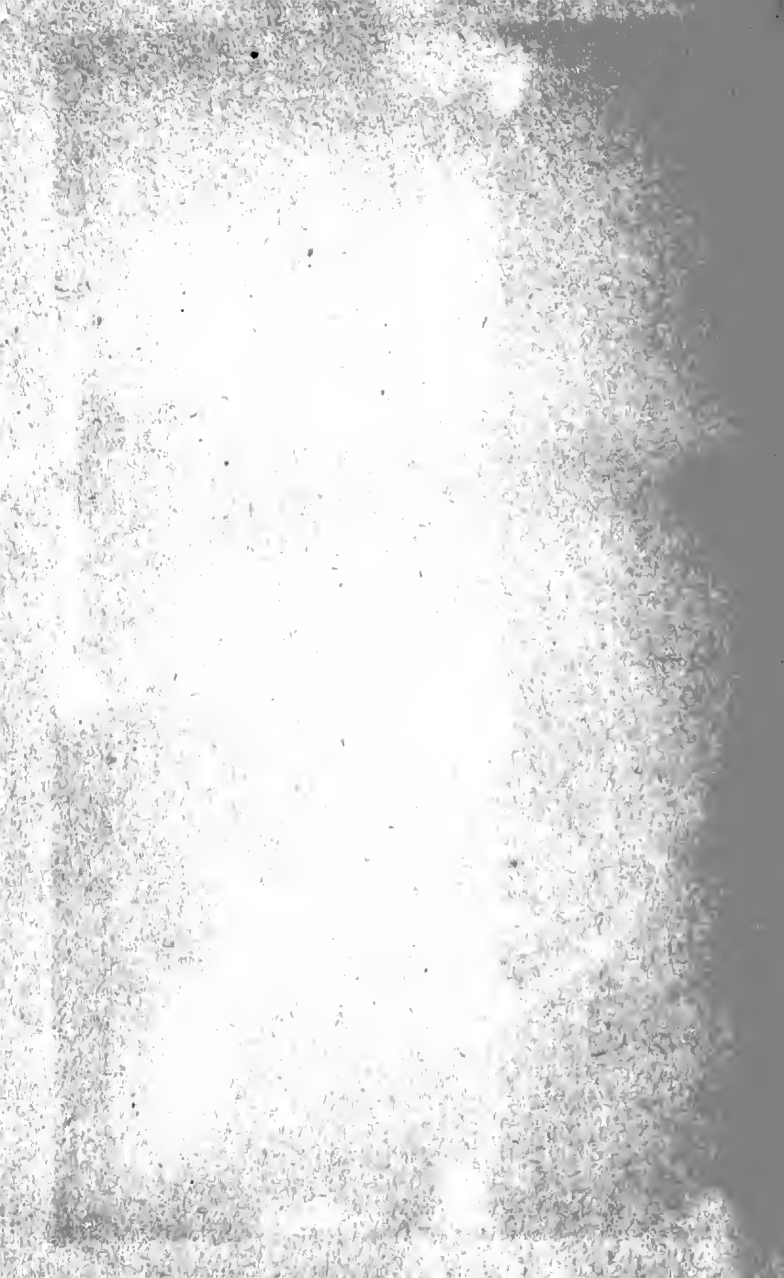
"Why, Moira," said Tom, quite briskly, "you must remember that I am a soldier now. I think I always wanted to be a soldier. It must be in my blood. When I get out of this place I shall go back to the Regiment, and I shall be quite happy there. I don't think I was cut out to be a marrying man, Moira;" he smiled at her so gaily that she almost broke down before them all; "and so the Regiment shall be my only bride."

And so, after all, the call of the Southern Cross was not the call of either strife or gold—but the call of loyal love.

THE END.







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